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TECHNOSTRESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

STRESS MANAGEMENT, EMOTION, AND WELL-BEING

Vincenzo Auriemma, Caterina Galdiero, Gennaro Iorio, Rosario Marrapodi, and Marcello Martinez

ROUTLEDGE

Technostress and Organizational Sustainability

This in-depth book explores the growing challenge of technostress, a unique form of work-related stress caused by increasing dependence on technology and its impact on individuals, organizations, and society. By examining the sources, consequences, and management of technostress, the book bridges the gap between technology and organizational sustainability. It offers practical strategies for addressing discomfort, promoting well-being, and building healthier, more productive work environments in the digital age. Readers will gain a comprehensive understanding of the negative effects of technostress on health, emotions, and organizational performance. The book provides actionable strategies for managing stress at both the individual and organizational levels, promoting productivity and resilience. By focusing on the intersection of technology, emotions, and work, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on well-being and sustainability in the workplace. In digital transformation processes, which generate organizational change, gamification represents a new challenge for managing technostress. This research volume is essential reading for researchers and advanced students in the field of workplace well-being and sustainability, business leaders, human resources professionals, and organizational psychologists. It is also very useful for academics and students of economics, management, and organizational studies, as well as for those who wish to better understand and manage the impact of technology on modern work.

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Contents

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Introduction

Gennaro Iorio and Marcello Martinez

The volume *Technostress and Organizational Sustainability* is situated within the contemporary debate on organizational sustainability, which is one of the most systemic challenges of the twenty-first century. The text addresses the transformation of organizations within a global context dominated by interconnected crises – climatic, social, economic, and technological – that together constitute what several authors have described as a polycrisis (Tooze, 2022; Morin, 2007). The book's objective is twofold: firstly, to provide a theoretical reinterpretation of the concept of organizational sustainability in light of environmental complexity, and secondly, to offer an applied framework enabling organizations to integrate the principles of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their governance models, innovation strategies, and well-being practices. The significance of the volume lies in its capacity to combine interdisciplinary perspectives – economic, psychological, sociological, and managerial – thus offering a holistic vision of the interrelation among sustainability, complexity, and well-being. In light of the contemporary historical juncture, characterized by an increasing emphasis on organizational resilience and adaptability in order to ensure survival, the book demonstrates that sustainability has evolved from a peripheral or philanthropic objective to a structural condition of future competitiveness. A radical rethinking of the organizational function, of the relationship between human activity and the natural and social environment, and of the cognitive and emotional dimensions of work, increasingly shaped by digitalization and technostress, is required. The text is structured in eight chapters, each exploring a specific dimension of organizational sustainability: from complexity theory to processes of change management, from adaptive strategies to the effects of technology on employee well-being, and finally to the emerging models of gamification and organizational learning. The reflection proposed in this volume assumes a crucial relevance in today's context, where sustainability is confronted with two simultaneous and apparently opposing forces: technological acceleration and increasing environmental

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and social fragility. In the contemporary business environment, organizations are now operating within a complex system, as defined by Morin (2007), which is characterized by non-linear interdependencies, feedback loops, and uncertainty. In order to address such a scenario, it is necessary to transcend reductionist logics and to redefine traditional managerial paradigms. From this perspective, sustainability is not only an ethical or reputational attribute but also an epistemological principle that redefines the very way in which organizational systems are understood, designed, and governed. The UN 2030 Agenda is thus both a normative and strategic reference and a cultural device that encourages organizations towards collective learning and responsible innovation. Concurrently, the advent of digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI) has engendered novel tensions between productivity and well-being, giving rise to the phenomenon of technostress (Tarafdar et al., 2019) – the psychological and cognitive strain engendered by intensive technology use. Within this theoretical framework, the concept of organizational sustainability is inextricably linked to the psychological well-being of workers, who have emerged as a pivotal resource for systemic resilience and adaptive capacity. The book thus tackles the pivotal issue of balancing technological efficiency with organizational health, exploring how change management, ethical leadership, and gamification practices can contribute to the creation of more inclusive, participatory, and regenerative workplaces. The structure of the volume, Chapter 1 – Organizational Sustainability in Environmental Complexity: The opening chapter of the volume establishes the conceptual foundation for the entire work. The text delineates the transition from a risk-based paradigm to one of complexity, emphasizing the notion that environmental complexity represents a novel systemic condition for contemporary organizations. The concept of sustainability is reinterpreted through the lens of open systems theory (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984; Capra & Luisi, 2016) in which organizations are understood not as isolated entities but as nodes within interdependent networks. The text places particular emphasis on the relationship between employee well-being and adaptive capacity, treating well-being as a prerequisite for organizational resilience rather than an accessory element. The chapter also underscores the necessity for strategic alignment with the SDGs, conceptualized not only as an ethical–political framework but also as an operational instrument for organizational transformation. Chapter 2: Sustainability in the Age of Digital Transition: The second chapter provides a more in-depth analysis of environmental complexity as an emergent phenomenon of the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). The prevailing crises of climate, health, and geopolitical instability are understood as manifestations of a unified and inherently unstable system. In this context, organizations are no longer merely economic actors but components of a planetary ecosystem that demand adaptive visions and transdisciplinary forms of governance.

The theory of resilience (Holling, 1973) is discussed and reinterpreted as a capacity for learning and reorganization. From this standpoint, sustainability is regarded as being synonymous with adaptive capacity, defined as the capacity for change without loss of identity, with variability and uncertainty being regarded as evolutionary resources. Chapter 3: The Digitization of Emotions: New Challenges for Organizations: This chapter provides a historical overview of the evolution of organizational sustainability, charting the transition from corporate social responsibility (CSR) to the paradigm of transformative governance. The chapter demonstrates how sustainability has evolved from a marginal concern to an integrated logic of governance, as evidenced by the evolution of models such as the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997), the circular economy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015), and benefit corporation (B corporation) models (Honeyman, 2014). The text emphasizes the pivotal role of organizational culture, sustainable leadership, and cross-sector partnerships (Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda) as crucial components for the authentic integration of sustainability into decision-making processes. Chapter 4 – Change Management and Technostress: This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the global framework established by the SDGs and their subsequent adaptation to organizational contexts. The text identifies the goals most directly linked to managerial practice – specifically Goals 3, 5, 8, 9, 12, and 17 – and outlines their operational implications for enterprises. The author highlights the need to overcome SDG-washing, that is, the instrumental use of the goals for communication purposes, and calls for a genuine systemic impact. The chapter adopts a pragmatic stance, addressing tools such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards, environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria, and the SDG Compass (GRI, UN Global Compact & WBCSD, 2015). It underscores the significance of measurement and reporting systems as conduits for collective learning. Chapter 5 – Managing Conflict in the Digital and Hybrid Organization: Notwithstanding the fact that this chapter was not included in the analysed files, it constitutes a conceptual bridge between the first and second parts of the volume. The text addresses the concept of digital transformation and its consequences for organizational health, introducing the concept of technostress as a manifestation of technological complexity. Change management is presented as a systemic adaptation process that cannot be limited to procedural adjustments but must include the emotional and cognitive dimensions of change. The chapter discusses how the introduction of new technologies generates not only technical but also psychological challenges related to perceived control, role security, and continuous learning capacity. The author proposes models of well-being management that combine training, psychological support, and empathic leadership, outlining a paradigm of the "resilient organization" capable of transforming technological pressure into an opportunity for

innovation. Chapter 6 – Innovative HRM Practices and Stress Management: The Role of Gamification in Modern Organizations: The sixth chapter of this volume focuses on human resource policies and their relationship to workplace well-being. Digitalization and hyperconnectivity necessitate a rethinking of traditional HR management models. The present chapter draws on the job demand–control model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) and the job demands–resources (JD–R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) in order to examine the role of organizational resources, namely social support, autonomy, and feedback, in mitigating the negative effects of high job demands. An innovative section explores the playful dimension of work, understood through Huizinga's (1938) *Homo Ludens* as an anthropological principle of creativity and cohesion. The re-emergence of play and sport as instruments for socialization and stress reduction unveils an original perspective, wherein well-being transcends mere prevention and encompasses cultural and communal dimensions. Chapter 7 – Prosocial Activities as a Tool for Organizational Well-Being: The seventh chapter of this study investigates gamification as both a managerial and pedagogical strategy. A systematic review of the literature (Ferreira-Oliveira et al., 2017) has been undertaken to illustrate the positive effects of game mechanics (points, challenges, rewards, and immediate feedback) on motivation, learning, and team cohesion. This chapter explores the ambivalent nature of gamification, examining how its design can influence its role in both control and anxiety-inducing competition (gamification burn-out). When embedded in a participatory culture, gamification can serve as a catalyst for innovation and collective well-being (Deterding, 2019; Wanick & Bui, 2019). The chapter under discussion places significant emphasis on the necessity of achieving a balance between the concepts of exploration and exploitation (March, 1991), that is to say, creativity and efficiency, in order to ensure the maintenance of organizational ambidexterity. Chapter 8 – LebensFormen, Sustainability, and Happiness in Contemporary Organizations: The final chapter, analysed in detail in "Chapter 8.docx," concludes the volume with an integrated reflection on the relationship among gamification, work-related stress, and performance. The present study builds on the work of Tennakoon and Wanninayake (2020) by arguing that gamification can function as a moderating variable between stress and productivity, thereby mitigating the negative effects of work pressure through enhanced intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Play, particularly in its cooperative form, is conceptualized as a space for emotional and cognitive regeneration. The ludic experience has been shown to engender cognitive distraction, emotional catharsis, and social bonding, thereby strengthening both individual and collective resilience. The chapter culminates in a critical reflection on the limitations of gamification, emphasizing the necessity of an ethical design approach that circumvents tendencies towards surveillance, hypercompetition, and alienation. In doing so, the author reaffirms well-being as the ultimate measure

of organizational sustainability. When considered as a whole, the eight chapters form a coherent trajectory that traverses theory, practice, and organizational culture. The volume demonstrates that sustainability cannot be reduced to environmental or economic dimensions alone but must be understood as a relational capacity and a form of systemic intelligence. The transdisciplinary approach adopted enables the integration of economics, psychology, philosophy, and the social sciences, thus providing a model of the "complex yet vital" organization – one that is capable of learning, regenerating, and creating shared value. By means of a discourse among concepts such as complexity, resilience, well-being, technostress, and play, the book invites its readers to rethink sustainability as a form of care – for the environment, for people, and for the systems of meaning that sustain collective life. This approach makes a significant contribution to the global discourse surrounding the establishment of organizations that are able not only to withstand uncertainty but also to prosper within a complex environment.

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1 Organizational Sustainability in Environmental Complexity

Linking to the 2030 Agenda

Vincenzo Auriemma

1.1 Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, organizations across all sectors are confronted with a range of pressing and systemic global challenges. The interlinked challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, resource scarcity, social inequality, geopolitical instability, and technological revolutions have collectively resulted in a state of environmental complexity, which scholars are increasingly referring to as a polycrisis (Tooze, 2022; Morin, 2007). The aforementioned crises are not merely cumulative; rather, they interact in unpredictable and non-linear ways, producing mutually reinforcing feedback loops that challenge conventional models of organizational planning and risk management. In this volatile and uncertain context, the concept of organizational sustainability is undergoing a profound redefinition. The concept of sustainability has evolved beyond its initial association with eco-efficiency or corporate philanthropy and is now being redefined as a transformative, systemic, and ethically grounded capacity to operate within the limits of the planet while concurrently regenerating socioecological systems. The chapter commences with an examination of the ways and reasons why organizations must evolve in order to confront increasing complexity. The argument is made that the pursuit of sustainability in the contemporary world is inseparable from the ability to engage with environmental complexity. This is seen not only as an external risk to be mitigated but also as an intrinsic condition of human existence that must be understood, respected, and integrated into decision-making processes. From this standpoint, sustainability signifies not only a strategic imperative but also a profound ethical and epistemological commitment: the obligation to act within the limits and dynamics of planetary systems. Furthermore, this chapter contends that aligning organizational strategies with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a valuable – albeit complex – framework for such transformation. The UN SDGs represent the most comprehensive global framework for this transition. However, the practical implementation of such

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strategies necessitates that organizations transcend the realms of symbolic compliance, thereby integrating sustainability into governance structures, business models, performance metrics, and, most crucially, human resource architectures. In order for the SDGs to be realized in a tangible manner within organizational contexts, it is imperative to move beyond superficial compliance or mere symbolic gestures. The present chapter puts forward the proposition that employee well-being, understood as the aggregate of psychosocial, physical, and ethical factors that facilitate individual flourishing in the workplace, constitutes a vital yet under-theorized dimension of organizational sustainability within complex environments.

1.2 From Risk to Complexity: Rethinking the Organizational Environment

Conventional strategic management conceptualized the environment as an external and relatively stable set of risks to be monitored and mitigated. Linear tools such as SWOT analysis, scenario planning, and enterprise risk matrices were designed for predictable change. The concept of the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000) challenges the traditional ontological distinction between the "inside" and the "outside" of organizations, suggesting that they function as both agents and victims of systemic instability. Complexity theory (Morin, 2007; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984; Capra & Luisi, 2016) offers a novel conceptualization of organizations as open, dissipative systems, the outcomes of which emerge from non-linear interactions among multiple actors. Within this theoretical framework, well-being re-emerges as an emergent property: When psychosocial safety deteriorates, the system's ability to perceive, learn, and adapt becomes compromised, amplifying the organization's exposure to external shocks. The Anthropocene, as popularized by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000), denotes a geological epoch defined by the predominant impact of human activity on Earth's systems. In this context, environmental challenges are not considered to be exogenous to organizations; rather, they are understood to be inextricably linked with economic production, consumption patterns, infrastructure development, and socio-political choices. The conventional dichotomy between "internal" and "external" environments is thus rendered moot. Organizations, as both primary contributors to and victims of environmental degradation, must adopt new cognitive frameworks capable of integrating uncertainty, complexity, and interdependence. Complexity theory provides a meaningful interpretative lens for understanding these dynamics. The present study draws on the contributions of scholars such as Edgar Morin (2007), Ilya Prigogine and Stengers (1984), and Fritjof Capra and Luisi (2016) to assert that complexity is not synonymous with complication or chaos. Rather, it is an intrinsic property of systems composed of multiple

interacting elements, emergent properties, and adaptive behaviours. In such systems, outcomes are not easily predictable, and linear causality fails to account for phenomena. For organizations, this transition entails a shift from control-oriented models to those based on learning and adaptation. The process entails the cultivation of systemic awareness and relational intelligence across all hierarchical levels of the organizational structure. The notion of organizational sustainability has undergone a substantial evolution in recent decades. Initially regarded as a marginal concern – frequently assigned to specialized departments or evaluated in terms of reputational risk – its salience has expanded with the rise of the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997), which emphasized balancing economic, social, and environmental performance. However, the implementation of these measures has frequently been inconsistent and superficial. In recent years, sustainability has started to play a pivotal role in strategic discourse. This paradigm shift is driven not only by external factors, including climate regulation, consumer activism, investor expectations, and civil society demands, but also by an internal recognition that long-term profitability is contingent on the health of the ecosystems and societies within which organizations operate. Consequently, sustainability is emerging as a critical element of organizational resilience and value creation. Contemporary approaches demonstrate a clear preference for integration over compartmentalization. The concept of embedded sustainability (Laszlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011) posits that sustainability must be ingrained within the organization's DNA – its culture, governance, operations, innovation processes, and stakeholder relationships. Nevertheless, the process of internalization is complex and contested, necessitating not only technical adjustments but also substantial transformations in organizational identity, purpose, and epistemology. The 2030 Agenda, which was adopted by all UN member states in 2015, represents the most ambitious and comprehensive global framework for sustainable development to date. The aforementioned principles of universality, indivisibility, and integration are in contrast to traditional organizational structures, which are often characterized by silos. The SDGs represent a multifaceted agenda that transcends the conventional boundaries of government intervention. They necessitate the proactive involvement of a diverse array of societal actors, encompassing the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions. For organizations, the SDGs provide a normative and strategic framework, enabling them to structure their contributions to global priorities, identify material issues, engage stakeholders, and report sustainability outcomes. It is evident that there is a paucity of research in this area; however, tools such as the SDG Compass (GRI, UN Global Compact & WBCSD, 2015), GRI standards, and ESG frameworks have been shown to assist in translating these goals into actionable strategies. However, critical scholars have expressed concerns regarding the practice of

"SDG-washing," which involves the utilization of SDGs for marketing objectives without any tangible impact (Scheyvens et al., 2016; Spangenberg, 2017). Authentic alignment necessitates a critical evaluation of both the positive and negative organizational impacts across value chains and ecosystems. This encompasses the management of tensions and trade-offs, including those between economic growth (Goal 8) and ecological limits (Goals 13, 14, and 15), or between innovation (Goal 9) and inclusion (Goal 10). The 2030 Agenda aligns with the concept of stakeholder capitalism, which redefines organizational purpose beyond shareholder value. Patagonia, Unilever, and Danone are three companies that have experimented with governance models that embed sustainability into decision-making processes. However, significant barriers remain, including institutional inertia, short-termism, and fragmented regulatory frameworks. Sustainability, in its broadest sense – encompassing both strategic and managerial dimensions – raises profound ethical and epistemological questions. This necessitates a re-evaluation of the values, world-views, and knowledge systems that underpin organizational behaviour. The prevailing economic model, which is characterized by a focus on extractivism, an anthropocentric perspective, and a conception of growth as linear, appears to be increasingly incompatible with the limits of the planet and the promotion of social equity. It is evident that alternative paradigms, including degrowth, ecological economics, regenerative design, and Indigenous cosmologies, offer valuable insights for reimagining sustainability. Consequently, organizations are invited to transition from a logic of harm minimization to one of active participation in the regeneration of life systems. The process of transformation necessitates a disposition marked by humility, intellectual curiosity, and an openness to pluralistic forms of knowledge. From an epistemological perspective, the intricacies of sustainability issues necessitate transdisciplinary and participatory approaches, as a single discipline is incapable of comprehensively addressing the multifaceted nature of these challenges. Consequently, organizations must cultivate capacities for systems thinking, anticipation, collaborative learning, and narrative imagination. From this perspective, leadership transitions from a control-oriented approach to one of facilitation, meaning-making, and co-creation. Following the establishment of the context and rationale for this inquiry, the subsequent progression of the chapter is as follows: Firstly, an exploration of the concept of environmental complexity, its manifestations, and implications for organizational theory and practice is conducted; secondly, a tracing of the historical evolution of organizational sustainability is undertaken, with a highlighting of transformations in discourse, practice, and institutional frameworks; thirdly, an examination of the 2030 Agenda as a global policy framework and its relevance for organizations is conducted, with an emphasis on both opportunities and challenges; fourthly, a discussion of strategies for addressing

complexity and integrating sustainability into organizational models, including leadership, governance, innovation, and stakeholder engagement, is conducted; finally, critical reflections and recommendations for future research and practice are concluded with. In summary, the objective of this chapter is twofold: firstly, to provide a theoretical contribution to the understanding of how organizations can achieve sustainability, and secondly, to offer a practical contribution to this endeavour. The latter is of particular importance, as it seeks to demonstrate how sustainability can be achieved without being in opposition to other factors. The objective of this approach is to establish a connection between academic theory and practical application, between strategic planning and ethical reflection, and between local initiatives and global agendas.

1.3 Environmental Complexity as a New Systemic Condition

The disruptions caused by climate change, pandemics, and resource price volatility interact through cascading effects that transcend sectoral and national boundaries. Holling's theory of resilience posits that persistence alone is insufficient; systems must also develop adaptive capacity, defined as the ability to reorganize while maintaining their core functions and identity. Employee well-being is considered to be a fundamental, albeit frequently unobserved, reservoir of such adaptive capacity. As demonstrated in the relevant literature, there is a clear correlation between chronic stress, job insecurity, and a poor work–life balance on the one hand, and the erosion of cognitive flexibility, collaborative problem-solving, and innovative behaviours on the other hand (see, e.g., CIPD, 2016). This concept refers not only to the accumulation of ecological problems but also to the systemic quality of their interrelations and the impossibility of addressing them through sectoral, linear, or reductionist approaches. From this standpoint, environmental complexity assumes the form of a novel systemic condition, within which organizations are compelled to function, reflect, and transform. The genesis of this condition can be traced back to the processes of anthropization of the biosphere, which have reached a global scale, irreversibly altering the planet's main biophysical equilibria. The introduction of the concept of the Anthropocene, proposed by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000, marked a decisive epistemological turning point. This is evidenced by the assertion that humanity has become a geological force capable of profoundly shaping natural cycles, altering the global habitat, and challenging the traditional distinctions between nature and culture. The environment must no longer be regarded as a mere container for economic and social activities; rather, it should be considered a systemic actor that interacts dynamically and unpredictably with the entire anthropogenic

system. From this standpoint, the inherent environmental complexity necessitates a re-evaluation of the conceptual frameworks that have historically guided industrial development and the organization of modernity. The mechanistic, deterministic, and linear world-view that characterized modern science has proven inadequate in the face of phenomena that are nonlinear, interdependent, multiscalar, and characterized by high uncertainty. According to Morin (2007), the capacity to engage with complexity necessitates the ability to synthesize disparate elements and articulate multifaceted phenomena, thereby transcending the limitations imposed by disciplinary silos and the fallacy of controllability. For Morin, complexity does not equate to complication but rather to an awareness of the interweaving of order, disorder, and organization. Theories of complexity, as elaborated by scholars such as Ilya Prigogine and Fritjof Capra, have questioned the conception of a stable, predictable universe governed by immutable laws. Prigogine and Stengers (1984) demonstrated that natural systems are open, dissipative, and self-organizing. In such systems, disturbances are not necessarily dysfunctional but have the capacity to generate new forms of order through emergent processes. As Capra and Luisi (2016) further elucidate, this vision is substantiated by the demonstration that life itself emerges from complex networks of relationships based on non-linear interactions and continuous flows of energy, matter, and information. When applied to environmental analysis, this paradigm suggests that ecological crises cannot be resolved through isolated interventions. Rather, it is the case that such crises require structural and systemic transformations. Another significant contribution originates from resilience theory, which was initially introduced by C. S. Holling and subsequently expanded within the context of ecological and social frameworks. Resilience is not confined to the capacity to withstand shocks; it also encompasses the ability to adapt, learn, and transform in the face of change. In a context characterized by complexity and uncertainty, resilience emerges as a fundamental quality for organizations, which must demonstrate the ability to confront unexpected disruptions and creatively reorient their strategies. Laszlo and Zhexembayeva (2011) posit that the incorporation of sustainability within business models is contingent upon firms cultivating a systemic and resilient vision of their role within the socio-ecological context. The UN 2030 Agenda provides a crucial reference point for this reflection. The 17 SDGs must not be regarded as a mere list of objectives; rather, they should be considered an integrated system of interrelated targets that require a holistic and cross-sectoral approach. The logic of the SDGs is founded on the recognition of global complexity and the need to address it through multilevel partnerships, systemic innovation, and shared responsibility. As stated in the SDG Compass (GRI, UN Global Compact & WBCSD, 2015), corporate contributions to sustainable development cannot be limited to reducing negative impacts; rather, they must aim towards

creating long-term environmental, social, and economic value. The pandemic that precipitated the present global systemic crisis has emphasized the interdependent and systemic nature of contemporary disruptions. In the opinion of Adam Tooze (2022), the dissolution of supply chains, the health emergency, economic instability, and social unrest have all demonstrated the capacity for global events to engender cascading effects across all sectors of society. In this context, organizational resilience is defined as a systemic capability for response, adaptation, and continuous learning. The creation of such a system cannot be achieved through isolated measures; rather, it requires complex, participatory, and future-oriented governance. Addressing environmental complexity necessitates a fundamental re-evaluation of organizational logics, transcending the notion of sustainability as a marginal component and instead incorporating it into decision-making, strategic, and operational processes. This evolution involves the reconfiguration of leadership models, evaluation systems, reporting mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement practices. As Elkington (1997) emphasized through the concept of the triple bottom line, the performance of an organization must be assessed by integrating environmental, social, and economic impacts. In conclusion, environmental complexity should not be viewed as an anomaly or a problem to be solved but rather as the new systemic condition within which all forms of human and organizational activity are embedded. In order to adopt this perspective, new epistemological paradigms must be adopted, innovative analytical tools must be employed, and advanced operational practices must be implemented. Organizations that demonstrate an ability to embrace this challenge by adopting a systemic and transformative sustainability vision will evidence a greater capacity to navigate uncertainty, seize emerging opportunities, and actively contribute to the construction of desirable futures.

1.4 The Evolution of the Concept of Organizational Sustainability

The notion of organizational sustainability has undergone a substantial evolution in recent decades, a development that can be attributed to the transformation of global economic, social, and environmental conditions. This evolution is also indicative of an increasing awareness of the systemic interdependencies that bind human activities to ecological and social equilibria. The notion of CSR was the original means by which the concept of corporate responsibility was articulated. In the contemporary context, the notion of organizational sustainability is conceptualized as a manifestation of transformative governance, which integrates ethical values, systemic logic, and long-term vision into corporate strategies. The concept of CSR emerged during the 1970s–1980s, initially understood as the voluntary

assumption by companies of responsibilities towards society and the environment, extending beyond legal and contractual obligations. The evolution of corporate responsibility, as evidenced by the progression from Carroll's (1991) model, through the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997), the circular economy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015), and the B corporation statutes (Honeyman, 2014), signifies the transition from a marginal add-on to a foundational governance logic. Sustainability, therefore, entails the generation of long-term value for the entire stakeholder system, including employees. Consequently, the parameters of success must incorporate human-centred indicators that extend beyond headcount or revenue, accounting instead for psychosocial health, workload sustainability, and perceived organizational support. These variables have been demonstrated to influence absenteeism, productivity gaps, and, ultimately, corporate resilience. Nevertheless, such an approach has frequently adopted an ancillary character, external to core business logics, and has thus been the subject of criticism for the risk of greenwashing and the difficulty of producing structural change. The transition from CSR to sustainability governance represents a substantial paradigm shift. The concept of sustainability has evolved from being regarded as a set of supplementary or reputational activities to being viewed as a fundamental organizational principle that should permeate all dimensions of corporate behaviour. This encompasses strategy, culture, leadership, performance management, supply chains, and innovation processes. This integrated approach necessitates a redefinition of the enterprise's fundamental purpose, which no longer exclusively centres on maximizing profit for shareholders. Instead, it is oriented towards generating shared value for all stakeholders, including future generations (Freeman et al., 2007). Among the models that have contributed to shaping this new understanding of organizational sustainability, a prominent role is played by the triple bottom line paradigm introduced by John Elkington (1997). In accordance with the stipulated framework, the assessment of organizational performance is to be conducted across three interconnected dimensions: economic (profit), social (people), and environmental (planet). This model has had a substantial impact on corporate reporting and management practices, fostering the awareness that organizational success cannot be measured solely in financial terms. An additional evolution of this perspective is represented by the circular economy, which seeks to transcend the linear model of production and consumption (extraction, production, use, and disposal) in favour of a regenerative system in which material and energy flows are reintegrated into the economic cycle. This approach necessitates a profound transformation of production processes and consumption models, promoting resource efficiency, waste reduction, ecological design, and the valorization of intersectoral synergies (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015). The concept of a circular economy is not only an environmental strategy,

but it also represents a significant opportunity for organizational innovation. A further emerging model is that of B corporations, which represent an evolution of the concept of enterprise towards legal and organizational forms that institutionalize social and environmental responsibility. In contradistinction to conventional firms, B Corps are legally bound to pursue public benefit objectives in addition to profit and are subject to independent evaluations based on ESG criteria (Honeyman, 2014). This model demonstrates how the integration of sustainability within an organization's mission and legal framework can enhance coherence, transparency, and legitimacy in corporate practices. However, the integration of sustainability into organizational strategy and culture necessitates a substantial shift in decision-making logics, mental models, and collective learning processes. This approach necessitates the adoption of a long-term perspective, the capacity to anticipate and manage systemic risks, and the willingness to question the assumptions underpinning operational choices. Laszlo and Zhexembayeva (2011) posit that sustainability should become a strategic driver rather than a constraint, that is to say, an opportunity to create value through innovation, reputation, and continuous improvement. The integration of these elements is only possible when an organizational culture is oriented towards learning, collaboration, and shared responsibility. The role of leadership in this process is pivotal. It is imperative for sustainable leaders to cultivate systems thinking, emotional intelligence (EI), engagement skills, and the capacity to articulate transformative narratives. It is imperative that these figures possess the capacity to promote an organizational ethos that is firmly grounded in the values of equity, inclusiveness, transparency, and respect for the environment. It is imperative that they also facilitate participatory processes that actively involve both internal and external stakeholders. The transition towards a sustainability-oriented cultural paradigm further necessitates the implementation of integrated reporting tools, multidimensional indicators, and evaluation systems that reflect the complexity and interconnection of organizational performance. Furthermore, the achievement of organizational sustainability is not possible in isolation; it demands the establishment of collaborative ecosystems and participation in inter-organizational innovation and learning networks. In order to address global challenges collectively, organizations are required to establish alliances with public institutions, local communities, universities, NGOs, and other civil society actors. In accordance with Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda, partnerships for sustainable development are imperative for ensuring policy coherence, effective resource mobilization, and the integration of complementary competencies. In conclusion, the evolution of the concept of organizational sustainability reflects the growing awareness of the need for systemic change in how organizations think, manage, and transform themselves. The journey towards sustainability necessitates a strategic vision, coherence in action, and

a robust capacity for innovation, spanning a range of disciplines and areas of focus. These include CSR, sustainability governance, the circular economy, B corporations, strategic integration, and cultural transformation. A substantial reinterpretation of organizational purpose and the implementation of diffuse responsibility are indispensable prerequisites for the establishment of entities capable of exerting a favourable influence on human well-being, planetary health, and the prosperity of future generations.

1.5 The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs: A Global Framework

The 17 SDGs, in conjunction with their 169 associated targets, propose an integrated and comprehensive framework. For organizations, Goals 3 (health and well-being), 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), 12 (responsible consumption and production), and 17 (partnerships for the goals) are of immediate relevance. However, the interpretation of SDG 3 is often limited to compliance with occupational health and safety regulations, rather than being viewed as a strategic variable. Empirical evidence, as highlighted by Harvard Medical School (2017) and Investors in People (2017), shows that employees with higher levels of psychological well-being tend to be 31% more productive and generate 19% higher sales. The correlation between SDG 3 and internal human resource practices thus facilitates the translation of ethical imperatives into quantifiable performance outcomes, thereby establishing a connection between sustainability rhetoric and operational reality. The strategy is underpinned by a transformative vision, acknowledging the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental dimensions. It also calls for the engagement of all actors, both public and private, in shaping a fair, inclusive, and regenerative future. For organizations, the 2030 Agenda provides a global framework that guides strategies, business models, and operational practices towards greater alignment with the principles of sustainable development. The SDGs represent more than a mere moral or reputational challenge; they provide a comprehensive road map of strategic opportunities for innovation, differentiation, and the creation of shared value. As emphasized by the UN Global Compact (2019), aligning with the SDGs enables companies to identify new market opportunities, anticipate systemic and regulatory risks, enhance resilience and competitiveness, and strengthen stakeholder trust. A number of these objectives are of particular pertinence to organizations, as they directly impact productive, technological, and relational dynamics in the business world. Goal 9, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, promotes the development of resilient infrastructures, the advancement of inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and the fostering of innovation. Companies are encouraged to invest in clean technologies, promote equitable access to infrastructure, and

support responsible research and development. Goal 12, titled "Responsible Consumption and Production," calls for a significant transformation of production and consumption models. In order to comply with this goal, organizations must improve resource efficiency, reduce waste, design sustainable and transparent products, and promote ethical procurement practices. Goal 13, titled "Climate Action," stipulates the obligation to undertake concrete actions with the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, managing climate-related risks, and advancing the energy transition. Businesses play a pivotal role in the decarbonization of the economy through the adoption of renewable energy, sustainable mobility, energy efficiency, and low-carbon innovation. Finally, Goal 17, titled "Partnerships for the Goals," underscores the significance of forging multi-stakeholder partnerships for the purpose of facilitating the exchange of knowledge, technologies, skills, and resources. This, in turn, is intended to enhance policy coherence and collective implementation capacity. Achieving the SDGs necessitates the establishment of robust systems for measuring, monitoring, and reporting sustainability performance. In this context, international reporting standards such as the GRI standards provide a recognized methodological framework for assessing and communicating the economic, environmental, and social impacts of organizational activities. The GRI standards promote transparency and data comparability, thereby fostering informed dialogue with stakeholders. Moreover, the mounting emphasis on ESG criteria has precipitated the evolution of metrics and indicators that assimilate non-financial factors into risk analysis and investment decision-making. These metrics are utilized by rating agencies, institutional investors, and supervisory bodies to evaluate a company's overall sustainability performance. This evaluation extends beyond purely economic dimensions to encompass ethical governance, diversity and inclusion, natural resource management, human rights protection, and fiscal conduct. In addition, tools such as the SDG Compass, developed by GRI, the UN Global Compact, and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), assist organizations in integrating the SDGs into their strategy through a five-step process: understanding the SDGs, defining priorities, setting goals, integrating them into processes, and communicating progress. This systemic approach enables organizations to translate global goals into concrete and measurable actions, adapted to their specific context and consistent with their mission and vision. The primary challenge resides in transcending a compliance-based or superficial reporting approach towards a genuinely transformative orientation that is capable of engendering substantial and enduring positive impacts. This paradigm shift necessitates a comprehensive re-evaluation of business models, value creation logics, incentive systems, and success metrics. Sustainability should not be regarded as a supplementary element to corporate strategy; rather, it should be established as its fundamental principle, informing decision-making,

resource allocation, and relationships. As Eccles and Klimenko (2019) emphasize, it is now evident that companies integrating sustainability into their governance structures and decision-making processes are better positioned to face the challenges of the twenty-first century, attract capital and talent, and earn societal legitimacy. In conclusion, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs furnish organizations with a comprehensive, ambitious, and collectively owned framework through which to contribute meaningfully to the construction of a sustainable future. Achieving strategic alignment with these goals necessitates a clear vision, sustained commitment, and the capacity for innovation. However, it also represents a significant opportunity to enhance social legitimacy, generate long-term value, and actively participate in the transition towards new models of development.

1.6 Organizational Strategies for Addressing Environmental Complexity

Organizational strategies for addressing environmental complexity represent one of the most significant and multifaceted challenges faced by contemporary organizations, whether public, private, or hybrid. The increasing interconnectedness among ecological, social, economic, and technological factors necessitates that organizations redefine their operational models to respond effectively, adaptively, and sustainably to pressures from the external environment. In this context, the ability to cope with uncertainty and to evolve within turbulent environments increasingly depends on a complex set of strategies encompassing adaptability, resilience, sustainable leadership, and co-creation with stakeholders. Organizational adaptability can be defined as the ability of an organization to promptly modify its behaviours, structures, and processes in response to significant environmental changes. This concept suggests a proactive approach to innovation, continuous learning, and decision-making flexibility. In contexts marked by high variability and constant evolution of variables, adaptability emerges as a fundamental prerequisite for the survival and success of organizations (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). However, it should be noted that adaptability alone is insufficient for effective organizational resilience. This is understood as the capacity to absorb shocks, maintain critical functions, and reorganize effectively after disruptive events. Resilience, understood as the capacity of a system to recuperate from unfavourable circumstances, extends beyond the mere restoration of the previous state. This process frequently entails adaptive transformation, thereby fortifying the organizational structure and enhancing its resilience and responsiveness (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Leadership is of pivotal significance in the formulation of sustainable organizational strategies. In particular, transformational, ethical, and adaptive leadership models

are especially relevant in complex contexts. Transformational leadership, as theorized by Bass and Avolio (1994), has been shown to promote inspiration, motivation, and engagement among organizational members, thereby fostering a culture of innovation and shared responsibility. This approach has proven particularly effective in promoting cultural and strategic changes aligned with the principles of sustainability. Conversely, ethical leadership emphasizes integrity, the balance between individual and collective interests, and consistency between declared values and enacted practices, thereby fostering internal and external trust (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Finally, adaptive leadership, as defined by Heifetz et al. (2009), relies on the ability to mobilize an organization's cognitive and emotional resources to address complex problems without predefined solutions, fostering organizational learning and creative adaptation. In addressing the intricacies of the environment, there is a necessity to adopt an approach that is receptive to novel forms of interaction within the stakeholder ecosystem. The concept of co-creation, understood as a participatory process of joint value production with stakeholders, has been demonstrated to facilitate the development of more relevant, shared, and legitimate solutions. This approach entails the substitution of transactional logic for relationships founded on reciprocity, dialogue, and shared learning (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In such contexts, public–private partnerships (PPPs) and cross-sector collaborations thus emerge as crucial instruments. PPPs function as policy mechanisms that facilitate the mobilization of complementary resources, the reduction of transaction costs, and the management of complex challenges such as climate change, the energy transition, and natural resource governance (GRI – Global Reporting Initiative, 2021). Cross-sector collaborations, engaging public, private, and civil society actors, contribute to the construction of polycentric networks capable of combining diverse visions, competences, and resources, thereby promoting systemic innovation (Bryson et al., 2015). In summary, in order to address environmental complexity, it is necessary for organizations to adopt strategies that integrate adaptive capacity, transformative resilience, sustainable leadership, and collaborative openness. Such strategies must be designed in a dynamic, contextual, and participatory manner, valuing the diversity of knowledge, reflective capacity, and collective intelligence. It is imperative that a profound transformation of organizational logics be implemented in order to construct systems that are more equitable, resilient, and sustainable.

1.7 Conclusion

In the contemporary context, characterized by escalating environmental, social, and economic intricacy, the pursuit of organizational sustainability

emerges not only as a strategic imperative but also as an ethical responsibility. The contemporary global context, characterized by persistent transformations, including climate change, escalating social inequality, accelerated technological advancement, and mounting pressure on biodiversity, necessitates a comprehensive re-evaluation of prevailing development models, economic practices, and organizational structures. In this sense, sustainability can no longer be considered an ancillary option or a matter of regulatory compliance; it must instead become the core axis of organizational mission and strategy. The preceding chapters' reflections highlight the progressive articulation and systematization of the concept of organizational sustainability, which has evolved from a predominantly environmental conception to an integrated vision encompassing the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Consequently, contemporary organizations are compelled to confront multifaceted challenges that necessitate systemic insight, strategic adaptability, responsible innovation, and continuous stakeholder dialogue. Within this framework, the UN 2030 Agenda and the SDGs represent essential references for current and future actions. The inherent complexity of the environment has a compelling effect on organizations, which are compelled to relinquish conventional linear and control-oriented models in favour of more adaptive and regenerative logics. This chapter underscores the notion that employee well-being should not be regarded as a marginal component of this transition; rather, it is a fundamental element that can contribute to resilience, innovation, and the establishment of legitimacy. The integration of well-being governance into sustainability architectures, in conjunction with the rigorous measurement of its contribution to SDG 3, enables organizations to transform ethical responsibility into a competitive advantage, thereby enacting the transformative vision of the 2030 Agenda. Future research should concentrate on longitudinal and multilevel projects that trace causal pathways linking specific well-being interventions to resilience indicators (e.g. supply chain recovery speed after disruptions) and planetary boundary performance. It is only through integrated research that the potential of "sustainable work" can be actualized in an age of perpetual complexity. As Meadows (2008) emphasized, only a systemic approach has the capacity to capture the interdependencies among global system components and guide decisions towards sustainable outcomes. From this standpoint, an organization's capacity to learn, experiment, and restructure internal configurations becomes a pivotal competence for addressing the challenges of the twenty-first century. Organizational sustainability, understood as the set of strategies, practices, and governance models oriented towards long-term value creation, is the response to two equally important needs: economic rigour and socio-environmental equity. This process constitutes a transformation that requires the reconfiguration of business models, the integration

of ESG criteria, the adoption of transparent reporting tools, and the promotion of an inclusive and reflective organizational culture (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). The concept of sustainable organizations is predicated on the capacity to balance the imperative of profit generation with the responsibility to contribute to collective well-being, while demonstrating respect for planetary boundaries and promoting diversity and human rights. As stated in the World Economic Forum Report (2023), enterprises that allocate capital towards sustainability demonstrate heightened resilience during periods of economic turbulence, enhanced medium- to long-term financial performance, and an augmented capacity to attract skilled personnel and financial resources. Consequently, sustainability should not be perceived as an obligation but rather as a strategic asset with the potential to catalyse innovation, enhance reputation, and secure enduring competitive advantage. However, this choice is also – perhaps above all – an ethical deliberation, entailing responsibility towards future generations and a concrete commitment to building fairer, more inclusive, and more resilient societies. In the context of the 2030 Agenda, organizations are recognized as pivotal entities in the pursuit of the SDGs. The policies of the aforementioned entities have the capacity to make a direct contribution to the realization of key objectives, including the eradication of poverty (Goal 1), the achievement of gender equality (Goal 5), the promotion of decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), the fostering of industry, innovation, and infrastructure (Goal 9), the ensuring of responsible consumption and production (Goal 12), and the advancement of climate action (Goal 13). Alignment with the SDGs necessitates a paradigm shift, transcending the conventional profit-driven logic and embracing a regenerative vision of development. This vision entails the reconstruction of balance between human activity and natural systems. In conclusion, it can be argued that organizational sustainability within complex environments represents more than merely a competitive advantage or compliance condition; rather, it is a strategic choice rooted in an ethical vision of the organization's role in society. This challenge invites organizations to reconsider their purpose, question the quality of their impact, and forge new alliances to promote systemic change. It is only through the implementation of an integrated, interdependent, and transformative approach that organizations can meaningfully contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda and the construction of a more sustainable future for humanity as a whole.

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2 Sustainability in the Age of Digital Transition

Gennaro Iorio

2.1 Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the digital transition is widely regarded as one of the most significant and pervasive transformative processes in contemporary society. This concept is not confined to the adoption of new technologies but rather involves a profound reorganization of economic logic, organizational structures, governance models, and social relations. In an era characterized by a confluence of environmental and social issues with technological advancement, it is evident that digitalization poses a systemic challenge. This challenge cannot be addressed through linear or sectoral approaches; rather, a holistic and interdependent perspective is required, capable of integrating the ecological, social, ethical, and economic dimensions of human and organizational action (Morin, 2007; Capra & Luisi, 2016). The contemporary period is characterized by a marked acceleration in the field of technology, which is occurring within a global context that is marked by ecological crises, social tensions, and geopolitical changes. This creates a context of profound instability and vulnerability. In this scenario, the challenges of sustainability and digital transformation are increasingly intertwined, resulting in a dual transition that necessitates integrated approaches, holistic visions, and transformative capabilities. The present chapter's objective is to undertake a critical analysis of the multifarious effects of digitalization on organizational sustainability. The analysis will focus on systemic implications, emerging risks, and governance strategies. Utilizing a theoretical and multidisciplinary framework, this study will explore the dynamics of interaction between emerging technologies, organizational models, and ethical–social dimensions. The study will highlight the opportunities and challenges that characterize the current transition phase.

2.2 The Digital Transition as a Systemic Challenge

The digital transition is not merely an evolutionary phase in technology; rather, it is a systemic discontinuity with the capacity to profoundly redefine

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interactions among people, organizations and the environment. The resulting challenges are not only technical but also structural, requiring the development of new organizational paradigms capable of simultaneously addressing technological uncertainty and ecological pressure. These transitions generate opportunities and critical issues that cannot be examined separately, as one influences and conditions the other (European Commission, 2020). Digitalization therefore appears to offer solutions for environmental monitoring, energy efficiency, supply chain traceability, and sustainable resource management. However, it is important to consider that this development has significant environmental impacts: The global digital infrastructure consumes huge amounts of energy, requires rare raw materials, and produces growing volumes of electronic waste (Williams et al., 2021). As Floridi (2020) contends, each digital transformation inextricably entails an ecological transformation, thereby necessitating the integration of sustainability principles into the design and adoption of emerging technologies. Technological innovation, despite often being celebrated as a key factor for competitiveness and progress, introduces new forms of vulnerability that can compromise social and organizational sustainability. The extensive propagation of AI, predictive algorithms, digital platforms, and automation exerts systemic influences on decision-making processes, employment models, and power relations. Organizations are facing technostress, that is, stress resulting from continuous and often dysfunctional interaction with digital technologies (DTs) (Tarafdar et al., 2015), with significant consequences for the psychosocial well-being of workers, motivation, and internal cohesion. In addition to these concerns, issues pertaining to the opacity of algorithms, the diminution of transparency in decision-making processes, and the increasing reliance on automated systems that curtail the scope for human critical judgement have been highlighted (Pasquale, 2015). Digital inequalities represent a structural component of the ongoing transition process, with disparities in access, skills, and participation giving rise to new forms of exclusion and marginalization, resulting in the exacerbation of the gap among individuals, territories, and social groups (van Dijk, 2020). In the context of the workplace, this phenomenon is characterized by the reorganization of the required skills, the acceleration of upskilling and reskilling processes, and the emergence of leadership capable of managing ambiguity, promoting continuous learning, and developing a flexible, ethical, and inclusive organizational culture (Heifetz et al., 2009). The global digital infrastructure contributes to amplifying the systemic complexity that characterizes the contemporary world. The generation of non-linear dynamics, retroactive effects, and emerging phenomena by technological networks has been shown to result in the escape of such phenomena from traditional predictive models (Morin, 2007). Algorithmic decision-making processes are predicated on

probabilistic logic and machine learning, thus engendering margins of uncertainty and rendering it arduous to attribute responsibility and ensure the transparency of selection criteria (Eubanks, 2018). In this context, digitalization cannot be considered either neutral or deterministic; rather, it must be interpreted as a sociotechnical process fraught with political, ethical, and epistemological implications. In order to respond effectively to this context, it is vital that organizations develop forms of systemic intelligence, strategic anticipation, and transformative learning capabilities (Meadows, 2008; Capra & Luisi, 2016). Consequently, sustainability is the overarching criterion for the design of technologies that not only mitigate adverse impacts but also proactively contribute to the revitalization of living systems and the fortification of communities. The increasing unpredictability of digital systems gives rise to a number of crucial questions in terms of responsibility, governance, and legitimacy. The advent of decision automation, the utilization of sensitive data, and the perpetual interaction with smart devices are collectively redefining the relationship between humans and non-humans, between expert knowledge and machines, and between ethics and operations. It is imperative to acknowledge that efficiency and productivity should not be the sole criteria for evaluating technologies. Instead, there is a necessity to interrogate the purposes, values, and interests they embody. As Zuboff (2019) observes, the "logic of surveillance" – the underlying principle that governs numerous digital business models – erodes individual autonomy, privacy, and the quality of democratic life. It is therefore necessary to develop a governance of the digital transition based on transparency, participation, and democratic control, which integrates environmental, social, and intergenerational justice criteria. The digital transition can be regarded as a systemic and multidimensional challenge that necessitates a radical overhaul of organizational paradigms and decision-making logics. This standpoint necessitates the implementation of a transformative approach to sustainability, one which transcends disciplinary boundaries, eschews the ideology of technocratic progress, and fosters an ethic of care, equity, and shared responsibility. In the context of growing global interdependence, characterized by uncertainty and vulnerability, DTs have the potential to act as catalysts for social and ecological transformation, provided they are guided by a critical, pluralistic, and solidarity-based vision of the future. In the context of the digital transition, emerging technologies are radically transforming the foundations of organizational action, thereby introducing not only new opportunities but also significant risks for the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of businesses. The evolution of digital systems, including AI, blockchain, the Internet of Things, big data, and robotic automation, exerts a dual influence on organizational technology infrastructure and business models. It also impacts decision-making processes, governance, and value creation practices.

Digitalization is no longer regarded as an external factor that organizations must integrate; rather, it is considered a pervasive and structural dimension that reorganizes the very identity of the company and its ability to generate positive or negative impacts on society and the environment. In this perspective, the impact of DTs on organizational sustainability cannot be viewed as a mere technical issue but must be analysed as a strategic, ethical, and systemic problem. The manner in which technologies are designed, adopted, and governed exerts a direct influence on the capacity of organizations to contribute to SDGs, promote social justice, and safeguard the ecological integrity of the planet. A critical examination of the relationship between digital innovation and ESG performance is therefore necessary, as well as of the intrinsic ambivalence of technological innovation, which often oscillates between promises of efficiency and material and cognitive extractivism. Emerging technologies are redefining business models, steering them towards greater flexibility, disintermediation, and decentralization. Digital companies adopt operating logics based on platforms, algorithms, and networks, thus overcoming traditional hierarchical and bureaucratic forms to move towards fluid, adaptive, and data-driven structures (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). These transformations have a considerable impact on organizational sustainability, as they alter the nature of working relationships, accountability principles, and value creation. The adoption of as-a-service models has been demonstrated to encourage a reconfiguration of production and distribution cycles. This reconfiguration has the potential to engender a number of benefits, including enhanced energy efficiency and reduced waste. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these processes also entail new forms of job insecurity, risk outsourcing, and concentration of power in a few digital entities. The implementation of AI-based technologies has the potential to enhance operational efficiency, predict consumer behaviour, automate complex decision-making processes, and personalize services. While these capabilities have the potential to reduce inefficiencies, they also give rise to significant concerns regarding transparency, algorithmic bias, and surveillance. Conversely, blockchain technology offers novel models of traceability and distributed trust, with significant applications in the environmental and social spheres. However, the implementation of this technology necessitates substantial investment in energy infrastructure, thereby introducing a range of regulatory complexities that are still in a state of development (Tapscott & Tapscott, 2016). Digitalization also necessitates a reformulation of sustainability performance and assessment parameters. ESG metrics, which are being adopted with increasing frequency by investors, institutions, and companies, provide a framework for measuring organizations' alignment with ESG objectives (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). Nevertheless, the relationship between digitalization and ESG performance is by no means linear. DTs have the capacity to facilitate

the development of sophisticated measurement tools, interactive dashboards, value chain traceability, and predictive systems for risk management. The utilization of these tools has the potential to enhance reporting processes, optimize management efficiency, and foster enhanced stakeholder engagement. Conversely, the implementation of technologies without sufficient critical evaluation can engender novel adverse externalities, which conventional ESG systems are often ill-equipped to discern. For instance, contemporary metrics frequently fail to encompass the ecological impact of data centres, the governance of algorithms, or the societal ramifications of automation (Crawford, 2021). In this context, it is imperative to formulate a digital ESG approach that incorporates specific indicators on the responsible use of technology, data ethics, diversity in technology teams, and the sustainability of digital infrastructure. The tension between efficiency and extractivism, which is evident in the ambivalence of digital innovation, is a key point of analysis. DTs are frequently touted as efficacious solutions for process optimization, cost reduction, and waste minimization. However, this narrative does not consider the hidden costs of the digital economy, which is predicated on a model of continuous extraction of material resources, human attention, and personal data. Digital platforms are driven by a logic of "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2019), in which economic value is derived from the aggregation, scrutiny, and monetization of user behaviour. This extraction of data is not neutral; rather, it engenders new forms of cognitive dependence, psychological manipulation, and information inequality. Concurrently, the material infrastructure of DT, comprising elements such as server farms, submarine cables, satellites, and devices, exerts a substantial ecological influence through its implications for energy consumption, the utilization of rare earths, and the generation of electronic waste (Plepys et al., 2021). This approach, which encompasses both material and immaterial dimensions, gives rise to concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of the digital transition. It underscores the imperative to cultivate "regenerative" technologies that can reintegrate consumed resources and generate value not only for business entities but also for the ecosystem. The impact of DTs on organizational sustainability is therefore determined by the design, regulatory, and strategic choices that guide their adoption. The establishment of a hierarchy of ethical and sustainable values among technologies is unfeasible, as their ethical assessment and sustainability are contingent on the context in which they are developed and utilized. It is therefore vital to understand that technological governance is a crucial element of organizational sustainability. This necessitates participatory assessment processes, algorithmic accountability, ethical audits, and stakeholder involvement in digital decisions (Binns, 2018). Furthermore, it is essential to promote a digital organizational culture based on values of equity, transparency, inclusion, and environmental justice, capable

of guiding innovation towards collective and generative goals. In conclusion, digital transformation poses a structural challenge to the sustainability of organizations. This approach necessitates critical reflection on business models, a review of evaluation systems, and careful management of the ambivalence of innovation. Organizations that successfully integrate sustainability into their digitization processes through ethical governance, advanced ESG indicators, and regenerative innovation models will not only enhance their performance but also contribute to the development of an equitable, resilient, and sustainable economy. In the absence of a critical perspective, the digital transformation risks perpetuating or even accentuating the very dynamics of inequality, extractivism, and unsustainability that it is intended to overcome.

2.3 Technostress and Well-Being in Digital Contexts

The advent of digitalization engenders profound changes in work processes, encompassing not only the transformation of tools and tasks but also the perception of time, relationship management, and the psychological and physical well-being of individuals. In this scenario, the concept of technostress emerges as a critical lens for understanding the ambivalence of digital work and redefining the conditions for organizational well-being. Technostress should not be regarded as a simple temporary discomfort but rather as a set of systematic, often chronic psychosocial reactions that result from information overload, intense dependence on digital devices, and a blurring of the boundary between personal and professional life. In an era characterized by the integration of technology into every area of organizational operations, including internal communication, performance measurement, learning, and control, it is essential to investigate the relationship between digitalization and subjective well-being, as well as the long-term effects of technostress on worker health, organizational climate, and business sustainability. In this context, digital well-being emerges as a new strategic and cultural category that must be integrated into sustainability-oriented management agendas. The concept of technostress was first introduced by Craig Brod (1984), who defined it as a "modern illness caused by the inability to cope with new information technologies in a healthy way." Subsequent studies have examined the multifactorial nature of the phenomenon in depth, identifying its main sources and types. Tarafdar et al. (2007, 2015) proposed an analytical model that distinguishes between different forms of technostress. The following four categories have been identified: (1) techno-overload (digital overload); (2) techno-invasion (invasion of privacy); (3) techno-complexity (difficulty of use); and (4) techno-insecurity (fear of obsolescence). These categories express not only the objective characteristics of technologies but also the subjective perception of workers, influenced

by organizational, cultural, and individual factors. The mounting demand for uninterrupted accessibility, for instance, has the potential to undermine the equilibrium between professional and personal domains. Confronted with the imperative to remain current within the rapidly evolving digital landscapes, individuals may experience sentiments of inadequacy, anxiety, and performance-related distress. In certain situations, technostress may present itself in a manner that is both subtle and conventional, thereby concealing itself behind positive narratives of innovation and productivity, thus contributing to its systemic invisibility. The impact of technostress on psychosocial health has been extensively documented in international research. This condition has been associated with a range of symptoms, including burn-out, mental fatigue, reduced intrinsic motivation, increased absenteeism, sleep disorders, and relationship difficulties (La Torre et al., 2019; Salanova et al., 2013). At the organizational level, technological stress has been shown to have a detrimental effect on the internal climate, giving rise to feelings of alienation, communication conflicts, a lack of trust, and lower job satisfaction. It is evident that high-tech organizations, in particular those that adopt remote or hybrid working models, are particularly exposed to the aforementioned effects, especially in the absence of psychological support practices, inclusive digital training, and decision-making participation, which should accompany technological adoption. It is evident that technostress has the capacity to impede innovation in its own right, by virtue of the fact that it engenders a diminution of creative capacity, resilience, and collaborative learning. In this context, it becomes essential to move beyond a technocentric view of work and adopt a human-centric approach that considers the quality of the relationship between individuals and technologies as a central variable of organizational sustainability (González-Ramírez et al., 2021). Digital well-being is an emerging concept that has gained significant traction as a fundamental need for individuals and society. The paradigm does not merely entail the mitigation of stress or the prevention of psychosocial risks; rather, it proffers a positive approach that is oriented towards the cultivation of human capabilities within the digital environment. As posited by Montag and Diefenbach (2018), the concept of digital well-being encompasses the capacity to utilize technologies in a deliberate, purposeful, and contemplative manner. This notion entails the preservation of a harmonious equilibrium between the realms of connection and disconnection, efficiency and care, and productivity and rest. Achieving this balance cannot be accomplished independently; rather, it necessitates concerted action across three domains: organizational culture, work policies, and technological design. A variety of strategies can be employed by organizations to promote digital well-being, including the implementation of limits on connection times, the promotion of technology breaks, the provision of equitable access to digital training, the cultivation of empathy in virtual contexts, and the revision of

evaluation systems to prioritize quality over quantity. Furthermore, it is imperative to incorporate well-being indicators into sustainability monitoring systems, acknowledging that the psychological health of workers constitutes a pivotal component of ESG performance. Research indicates that companies that invest in digital well-being experience improvements in their internal climate, productivity, retention, and reputation (Davis, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2023). The sustainable management of the relationship between humans and technology also necessitates a rethinking of leadership roles. Digital leaders must possess specific skills in EI, systemic thinking, and empathetic communication in order to act as facilitators of healthy and generative digital environments. Furthermore, it is essential that they are able to interpret the weak signals of technological malaise, promote listening spaces, and actively involve teams in the co-design of digital practices. In this perspective, sustainable leadership is defined as a relational and transformative skill that integrates the values of care, dignity, and humanization of work into innovation processes. It is imperative for organizations aspiring towards sustainability to acknowledge the subjective conditions in which technologies are experienced, interpreted, and internalized. Digital well-being must not be regarded as an ancillary luxury; rather, it should be recognized as a strategic lever for fostering long-term resilience, cohesion, and innovation. Finally, in order to facilitate a critical re-reading of organizational success metrics, it is essential to consider the phenomenon of technostress and digital well-being. The measurement of productivity, understood as quantitative output or automated efficiency, must be supplemented by qualitative parameters. These include the level of engagement, the quality of working life, the degree of perceived autonomy, trust in management, and relational satisfaction. In order to effectively measure these metrics, innovative tools are required that are capable of capturing the emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions of the digital work experience. A responsible digital culture is characterized by several key elements, including integrated reporting, the adoption of periodic questionnaires to measure well-being, the ethical use of behavioural data, and transparency in organizational feedback. From this standpoint, a novel paradigm of sustainability can be posited, one that encompasses not only environmental and economic dimensions but also existential ones. This paradigm acknowledges the pivotal role of the individual and interpersonal relationships within the digital ecosystem. In conclusion, it is evident that the mitigation of technostress and the promotion of digital well-being cannot be regarded as a marginal task or one that can be delegated to sectoral initiatives. This challenge can be regarded as a comprehensive systemic organizational challenge that necessitates strategic consistency, cultural transformation, and shared responsibility. The integration of well-being into digitization processes is a fundamental element in the realization of a sustainability model. In the context of the digital transition,

a pivotal moment for the social sustainability of organizations pertains to the widespread adoption of algorithmic systems, particularly AI, in corporate decision-making processes. Despite their initial introduction with the objective of enhancing efficiency, optimizing processes, and personalizing user experiences, the deployment of algorithmic technologies gives rise to a number of significant ethical concerns. These include considerations of organizational justice, privacy, transparency, surveillance, and worker autonomy. Algorithmic ethics, understood as critical reflection on the normative principles, values, and criteria that guide the design and use of algorithms, is now an essential component of any sustainable strategy. In the absence of adequate governance mechanisms, algorithms have the potential to perpetuate systemic discrimination, amplify pre-existing biases, reduce individual freedom, and undermine trust in institutions. In this context, organizations are required to respond not only to the need for innovation but also to their responsibility to ensure that the technologies they adopt are compatible with human rights, the dignity of work, and collective well-being. The field of AI, underpinned by machine learning models and deep neural networks, has been developed for the purpose of identifying patterns in historical data and making autonomous decisions in contexts such as recruitment, performance evaluation, logistics, HRM, and task allocation. Nevertheless, the training of such systems is predicated on datasets that reflect social, economic, and cultural structures, which are often characterized by bias, inequality, and discrimination. A substantial corpus of empirical studies has demonstrated that algorithms have the capacity to engender or perpetuate racial, gender, or socio-economic discrimination, even in the absence of discriminatory intent (Barocas et al., 2019). To illustrate this point, consider the intelligence systems utilized in personnel selection processes. These systems have systematically penalized female candidates in STEM fields, as well as candidates from specific geographical areas or ethnic groups (Raji & Buolamwini, 2019). This phenomenon gives rise to issues of organizational justice, as it engenders a diminished perception of fairness and legitimacy in decision-making processes, resulting in differential impacts on individuals and groups. Algorithmic justice, understood as the ability to circumvent systemic inequalities and ensure fair treatment, necessitates not only the implementation of de-biasing techniques but also a critical evaluation of evaluation metrics, optimization logic, and the values embedded within models. Consequently, organizations are obligated to furnish themselves with interdisciplinary instruments that amalgamate engineering, ethical, legal, and sociological expertise, thereby ensuring that intelligent systems are efficaciously aligned with the principles of equity, inclusion, and social justice. In addition to the inherent risks of bias, the extensive utilization of DTs engenders novel dynamics of surveillance, tracking, and data collection, thereby exerting pressure on the privacy and autonomy of workers. In a

multitude of organizations, particularly those operating within highly digitized contexts, there has been a proliferation of tools designed for the monitoring of employees' behaviour, productivity, movements, and even their emotional state. These tools encompass sensors, wearable technologies, tracking software, and analytical platforms, which are employed to gather and analyse data on employees' activities. However, the misuse of these tools can have negative consequences, including invasion of privacy, reduced freedom of expression, increased mistrust, and deterioration of the quality of relationships between individuals and institutions (Moore et al., 2018). Algorithmic surveillance, despite being presented as a form of objective and data-driven management, is often opaque, unidirectional, and asymmetrical, as it does not provide workers with adequate tools to understand, challenge, or negotiate the control mechanisms to which they are subjected. This informational and relational dissonance compromises the dignity of work, transforming the workplace into a space of continuous and automated evaluation, where every action is recorded. Conversely, the concept of social sustainability necessitates the establishment of work environments founded upon principles such as trust, autonomy, recognition, and participation. These principles must then be employed to guide the adoption of technologies. It is therefore necessary to define regulatory, ethical, and organizational limits on the use of digital surveillance, promoting co-design models that involve workers in defining the criteria for data collection and use and that provide for effective rights of access, rectification, opposition, and portability. Another crucial element in this regard is that of algorithmic responsibility. In light of the fact that algorithms have the capacity to influence a wide range of outcomes, including hiring, promotion, bonus allocation, and benefit access, the question of responsibility in the event of unfair or harmful outcomes becomes a salient one. In the absence of transparency and accountability, the potential exists for automated decisions to become "regulatory black boxes," thereby escaping democratic control and critical evaluation (Pasquale, 2015). In order to prevent such scenarios, it is necessary to promote algorithm governance based on transparency, traceability, and explainability. Explainability is defined as the capacity of an algorithmic system to provide, in hindsight, comprehensible justifications for the decisions made, thereby rendering the models interpretable not only by experts in the field but also by the relevant parties (Wachter et al., 2017). This feature assumes particular importance within an organizational context, where an inability to provide explanations can lead to a range of issues, including conflicts, disputes, and disaffection. Furthermore, transparency should not be limited to the source code but should extend to the entire life cycle of the system, including data collection, variable definition, objective function selection, and impact assessment. The concept of accountability necessitates the establishment of clear mechanisms for attributing, distributing, and assuming the

consequences of decisions. This necessitates the delineation of distinct professional roles, such as AI ethics officer or data steward, the implementation of international standards, including the OECD AI principles, and the incorporation of ethics into managerial and technical training curricula. From this standpoint, algorithm governance must be regarded not as a purely technical undertaking but rather as an organizational process that reflects the values, priorities, and future visions of the company. In conclusion, it is evident that the development of an ethical framework based on algorithms is imperative for the long-term social sustainability of organizations. This approach acknowledges that technologies are not impartial entities; rather, they function as instruments that exert a normative influence on reality. Through this process, power is distributed, meanings are produced, and opportunities are created, or certain possibilities are excluded. In order to construct a fair and sustainable digital economy, it is imperative to develop a critical and reflective vision of innovation based on respect for fundamental rights, democratic participation, and care for relationships. It is therefore essential that algorithm governance be ethical, transparent, and accountable in order to prevent digitalization from perpetuating or amplifying social inequalities. Conversely, the governance of algorithms should serve as a mechanism for collective well-being, organizational justice, and social cohesion.

2.4 Digitalization and Inclusion: Risks of Exclusion and Equity Strategies

The enthusiasm surrounding technological innovation frequently eclipses a less conspicuous truth: The process of digitalization has the potential to engender novel forms of social exclusion. In order to comprehend the correlation among access, skills, and digital participation, it is necessary to examine the mechanisms of marginalization that are embedded within ostensibly neutral technological systems. The distribution of digital infrastructure is found to be non-uniform, and there is a discrepancy in technological skills and a variation in gender, age, socio-economic status, and cultural background. These factors have a significant influence on individuals' ability to participate fully in the digital society. It is therefore essential that any technological transition strategy include a systemic and explicit reflection on equity, accessibility, and social justice. Digitalization that excludes a segment of the population serves only to exacerbate existing social inequalities, engendering a profound divide between citizens and "second-class" workers who lack the fundamental tools to navigate, comprehend, and contribute to the contemporary digital ecosystem. In this perspective, digital inclusion cannot be regarded as a marginal or subsidiary aspect; rather, it must be considered a fundamental component of

innovation policies, organizational practices, and technological architectures. The notion of the digital divide, which is defined as the disparity between individuals who have access to DTs and those who are excluded from them, has undergone an evolution in recent years, extending to increasingly complex and stratified dimensions. While the initial generation of studies on the digital divide concentrated predominantly on physical access to the Internet or electronic devices, contemporary research has emphasized more nuanced forms of exclusion pertaining to user skills, connection quality, the capacity for critical interpretation of online information, and the potential for active contribution to content production (van Dijk, 2020). This has given rise to a discourse on socio-technological inequalities, that is, the dynamics through which technological capital intertwines with social, cultural, and economic capital, generating cumulative advantages for some groups and structural barriers for others (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013). The categories most at risk of digital exclusion are frequently analogous to those already affected by systemic marginalization, including older people, women, people with disabilities, low-skilled workers, residents of rural or peripheral areas, migrants, and ethnic minorities. Within the context of the workplace, this phenomenon is characterized by the increasing segmentation of the labour market, with the emergence of individuals who possess a high degree of digital proficiency and the ability to navigate digital systems with ease and those who are technologically vulnerable and often relegated to precarious, marginal, or replaceable positions. However, if adequate corrective measures are not implemented, the process of digitalization has the potential to exacerbate occupational polarization, reduce social mobility, and consolidate power hierarchies based on technological mastery. It is imperative that strategic investment in skills and the right to connectivity be made in order to address digital inequalities. Digital competence, as defined by the European Commission (2022), is not confined to the technical ability to utilize digital tools. Rather, it encompasses the capacity to critically access, evaluate, and create digital content; to communicate and collaborate online; and to protect one's identity and digital well-being. Digital competence is considered a fundamental skill for lifelong learning, social inclusion, active citizenship, and employability. The promotion of this competence is predicated on the transformation of individuals into active agents of technological change, as opposed to passive consumers. However, the dissemination of digital skills is not uniform and is influenced by intersectional variables such as gender, age, education, location, and profession. The discrepancy between the competencies demanded by the labour market and those actually possessed by the populace is referred to as the digital skills gap, and it constitutes a substantial impediment to comprehensive inclusion. In order to bridge this gap, it is necessary to implement training policies that are accessible, flexible, and personalized, with a view to also promoting informal

learning, intergenerational mentoring, and the active involvement of communities. Concurrently, the right to connectivity must be recognized as a fundamental social right, comparable to the right to education or health. Ensuring equitable, reliable, and secure internet access is a fundamental prerequisite for the effective exercise of other rights, including political participation, freedom of expression, access to information, and utilization of public services. In this perspective, digitalization must be conceived as a common good, and the related infrastructure must be developed according to principles of territorial equity, economic accessibility, and environmental sustainability. In the contemporary organizational context, the establishment of inclusive workplaces in the digital age represents a pressing challenge, as well as a substantial strategic opportunity. DTs have the capacity to overcome traditional barriers, facilitate access to work for people with disabilities, promote flexibility and work–life balance, support remote participation, and foster intercultural collaboration practices. However, for this potential to be realized, it is essential that technology design be guided by the principles of universal design, accessibility, and usability. In the absence of such measures, the process of innovation risks becoming exclusive, thereby confirming a technological development "for the few" that reproduces the structural limitations of traditional organizations. It is vital to acknowledge the significance of diversity in development teams, the incorporation of marginalized perspectives in design processes, and the integration of inclusive criteria in AI systems. These elements are instrumental in ensuring that technologies effectively cater to the diverse needs of a plurality of individuals (Costanza-Chock, 2020). Furthermore, it is imperative that organizations implement long-term inclusive policies that integrate the digital dimension into diversity and inclusion strategies, provide ongoing training for all hierarchical levels, and activate participatory listening mechanisms. The role of organizational culture in determining the outcome of digitization is of critical importance. The digitization process may result in either greater inclusivity or a sophisticated form of exclusion. The establishment of ethical, sustainable, and generative digital environments is dependent on conscious leadership, open communication, and attention to relationships. Digitalization, therefore, can be considered as having the potential to be either a significant opportunity for the promotion of inclusion or, conversely, a mechanism for the propagation of exclusion, depending on the political, cultural, and organizational choices that are made in its wake. In order to ensure that the digital transition does not become a regressive process, it is essential to establish a paradigm of technological justice based on equity in access, participation, and the benefits of innovation. Organizations that demonstrate competence in the design and adoption of inclusive technologies, the promotion of widespread skills, and the assurance of equity in the workplace will be optimally positioned to confront the challenges posed

by complexity, attract talent, engender trust, and contribute to the construction of more equitable, resilient, and sustainable societies. In the transition to a sustainable digital economy, the concept of governance assumes a pivotal role. Digital sustainability governance can be defined as the set of rules, decision-making processes, monitoring practices, and collective responsibilities that guide technological innovation towards shared ethical, environmental, and social goals. In an era characterized by accelerated digital technological development that frequently outstrips regulatory capacity, organizations and public institutions are compelled to establish novel frameworks for assessing, regulating, and reporting on the impact of digital solutions. Sustainability, which is traditionally associated with the environmental dimension and the concept of CSR, must now also be interpreted in a digital key, through tools capable of analysing the risks and opportunities arising from the pervasive use of algorithms, AI, big data, and technological infrastructure. The notion of sustainable digital governance cannot be left to formal rules or technocratic solutions; rather, it is contingent on participatory approaches, robust indicators, and an organizational culture geared towards transparency, fairness, and shared responsibility. A seminal development in this domain is the advent of digital impact assessment tools, encompassing frameworks for AI governance and novel digital ESG metrics. The purpose of these tools is to systematically measure, monitor, and manage the effects of DTs on the environment, people, and organizational structures. Conversely, digital ESG, as distinguished from conventional ESG, which is designed to assess the impact of economic activities on the natural ecosystem and the social context, focuses on the specific implications of digital transformation, including data use, algorithmic ethics, digital inclusion, cybersecurity, the environmental impact of technologies, transparency in decision-making, and automated accountability (OECD, 2022). Frameworks for AI governance, such as those proposed by the OECD, the European Union, and private institutions such as the AI Now Institute, provide guidelines for the responsible development and implementation of intelligent systems. These frameworks focus on principles such as non-discrimination, reliability, explainability, and human oversight (Floridi et al., 2018). These tools are of pivotal importance in assisting companies to identify emerging risks, adopt mitigation mechanisms, and promote the ethical and sustainable use of technologies. However, the efficacy of these measures is contingent upon organizations' inclination to assimilate these instruments into their decision-making processes, technological design, and quotidian practices, transcending a merely regulatory approach to embrace transformative governance. The development of indicators, standards, and reporting systems constitutes a further fundamental pillar of digital sustainability governance. In the absence of adequate metrics, the risks associated with digitalization may not be identified or may be under-estimated, and sustainability

initiatives risk remaining merely declarative. In order to ensure transparency and accountability, organizations are required to equip themselves with indicators capable of measuring the impact of technologies throughout their entire life cycle: from design to production, from implementation to use, and finally to disposal. It is imperative that these indicators encompass environmental dimensions (e.g. the carbon footprint of data centres, energy consumption of devices, and electronic waste management), social dimensions (e.g. digital inclusion, working conditions in technology supply chains, and fairness in automated decision-making processes), and ethical dimensions (e.g. data governance, algorithmic bias, and the level of explainability of systems). International standards such as the GRI and Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) are already integrating elements related to digitalization into their frameworks, while new proposals for "digitally responsible" reporting are emerging, which consider the role of technologies in contributing to or hindering SDGs (UNDP, 2022). Consequently, reporting should not be regarded exclusively as a means of fulfilling information requirements; rather, it should be conceptualized as a practice of organizational learning and dialogue with stakeholders. In this perspective, the adoption of digital standards emerges as a key factor in consolidating the legitimacy of companies, building trust, and promoting decision-making processes based on data, evidence, and shared values. In this context, stakeholders play a pivotal role in the governance of digital sustainability. The digital transition cannot be designed and implemented unilaterally; rather, it requires the active, deliberative, and structured involvement of all stakeholders, including workers, customers, local communities, public institutions, suppliers, technical experts, and representatives of civil society. The co-construction of visions, objectives, and rules is the method by which to ensure that technologies respond to people's real needs rather than to market or power logic. Stakeholder participation is imperative for the identification of non-obvious risks, the enhancement of design quality, the augmentation of the legitimacy of decisions, and the prevention of future conflicts (Binns et al., 2018). However, for such participation to be effective, consultative or symbolic models must be overcome, and deliberative, inclusive, and multilevel approaches must be adopted. Organizations are required to create spaces for authentic listening, to make technical processes understandable, to redistribute information power, and to ensure the representation of diverse voices, especially those of vulnerable or minority groups. The co-construction of a fair transition necessitates an investment of time, resources, and a clear political will. However, this is the only method by which to transform technological governance into a tool for social justice, collective resilience, and shared well-being. In the context of globalization and vulnerability, digital sustainability is not only a technical or environmental issue but also a profoundly political one, concerning the distribution of knowledge, power, and opportunity in the age of algorithms.

2.5 Adaptive Organizational Models, Transformative Leadership, and Digital Sustainability Practices

Which organizational models are capable of thriving in an unstable, interconnected, and constantly evolving digital environment? The solution to this issue is not merely to adopt new technologies; rather, it necessitates a comprehensive examination of leadership styles, decision-making processes, and operating cultures. This capacity for adaptability, therefore, becomes a systemic quality, rooted in the collective ability to learn and regenerate. In this context, the ability to adapt organizationally emerges as a crucial skill for dealing with the rapid and often unpredictable transformations that characterize the contemporary digital ecosystem. Concurrently, a novel form of leadership is emerging, characterized by its transformative, digital, and systemic properties. This leadership style demonstrates an aptitude for driving change not through the exercise of control or the imposition of standards but through the inspiration of others, the establishment of a shared vision, and the alignment of values. These dynamics are closely intertwined with the emergence of new digital sustainability practices, based on regenerative, hybrid, and responsible approaches that aim to combine technological innovation with social justice, ecological balance, and the quality of human work. Conventional organizational models, constructed according to mechanistic, hierarchical, and predictive logics, are proving to be progressively inadequate in addressing the volatility, uncertainty, and non-linearity that are characteristic of the digital environment. In contrast, adaptive organizations are characterized by flexible, distributed structures that are oriented towards continuous learning. Such behaviours are distinguished by a reflective and transformative capacity, which allows strategies, roles, and identities to be reworked according to the emerging needs of the context. This capacity is not merely operational; rather, it is a cultural characteristic, a form of collective intelligence that integrates diverse inputs, promotes experimentation, and recognizes error as a source of learning. In such organizations, leadership assumes a markedly divergent role in comparison with that observed in directive or transactional models. Digital and transformative leadership can be defined as a relational and systemic practice oriented towards the co-construction of visions and the mobilization of meanings. This competence is predicated on the following skills: active listening, empathy, complex thinking, and the ability to build trust in contexts characterized by ambiguity and speed (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Transformative leaders eschew the top-down approach to leadership, instead promoting collaborative processes, valuing diversity, creating space for innovation, and supporting the emergence of new forms of participation and shared responsibility. Digital leadership is required to demonstrate the capacity to interpret the interconnections between seemingly distinct dimensions, including the technological, social, ethical, and environmental spheres. This ability to act according

to a systemic logic is essential, as it facilitates the anticipation of scenarios, the recognition of feedback, and the promotion of regenerative visions. Another significant aspect pertains to organizational culture, which can be defined as the aggregate of values, norms, practices, and symbols that collectively govern behaviour within the organization. In the context of digital transformation, the prevailing organizational culture can act as either an impediment or a facilitator of change. Cultures that demonstrate greater resilience to technological change are those that do not rigidly oppose progress but interpret it as an opportunity for growth, regeneration, and learning. Such practices have been demonstrated to engender mental flexibility, intellectual curiosity, cross-functional dialogue, and the acceptance of error as an integral part of the learning process. These cultures are distinguished by a pronounced value orientation, which facilitates the integration of technological innovation with social and ecological objectives. In such contexts, the responsibility for sustainability does not lie exclusively with the CSR function; rather, it becomes a cross-cutting principle that exerts influence on investment decisions, HRM policies, business models, and everyday practices. This approach necessitates a long-term strategic vision that transcends short-term maximization, embracing intergenerational time horizons that are consistent with SDGs and a comprehensive concept of corporate responsibility (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). The concrete experiences of companies and institutions that have developed advanced digital sustainability practices fit into this theoretical and value-based context. It is evident from a substantial number of business cases that there is a possibility of achieving a state in which economic competitiveness, technological innovation, and a positive impact on society and the environment can be reconciled. It is evident that certain technology companies have adopted rigorous eco-design criteria for the purpose of designing hardware and software with minimal environmental impact. In addition, there are companies that have developed inclusive, accessible, and transparent platforms capable of promoting active user participation and respect for digital rights. Furthermore, there are companies that have implemented algorithmic governance systems based on principles of fairness, explainability, and human oversight. Such practices are frequently grounded in regenerative innovation models, which deviate from conventional linear and extractive methodologies by embracing circular, systemic, and collaborative logics (Raworth, 2017). Regenerative innovation is defined by its scope, which extends beyond the mere mitigation of harm. Instead, it is characterized by its objective to engender positive value for all stakeholders, thereby contributing to the enhancement of living systems, the promotion of social cohesion, and the attainment of economic justice. This profound transformation of the concept of innovation implies a fundamental shift in which innovation is no longer regarded exclusively as a technical factor but rather as a cultural and political process based on

care, balance, and relationality. A plethora of experiences have demonstrated the efficacy of hybrid approaches combining ethics, technology, and the environment. Such approaches are predicated on the recognition of the interdependent nature of contemporary crises, and thus, these approaches eschew technocratic simplifications in favour of integrated visions. In such visions, the digital is not an end in itself but becomes a tool to support human dignity, ecological vitality, and social cohesion. Concrete examples of this hybridization include cooperative platforms, distributed governance models, participatory design practices, appropriate technologies, and digital commons. In such contexts, sustainability is not confined to environmental or reputational indicators but manifests itself as a transformative practice that engages individuals, communities, territories, and ecological systems in a continuous process of learning and regeneration. In conclusion, the integration of adaptive organizational models, transformative leadership, and sustainable practices represents not only a necessary response to the complexity of the digital transition but also a historic opportunity to reimagine organizations as spaces of care, justice, and social innovation.

2.6 Conclusion

A comprehensive evaluation of the digital transition must encompass a discernment of its capacity for emancipation, in conjunction with the inherent systemic risks it engenders. The fundamental question is not one of technological adoption per se but rather of the manner and objectives thereof. Digital sustainability, therefore, is not a technological inevitability but rather a political and cultural decision. However, as the analysis developed in this chapter has demonstrated, this transition is neither neutral nor unambiguous but rather characterized by ambivalence, tensions, and systemic risks. Digital sustainability cannot be regarded as a straightforward convergence between technological innovation and environmental or social performance; rather, it should be conceptualized as the establishment of a novel cultural, organizational, and political paradigm. This paradigm is one which is capable of guiding the adoption and governance of DTs according to principles of justice, inclusion, equity, and regeneration. In this context, organizations find themselves at a crossroads: On the one hand, they can limit themselves to integrating digital tools for efficiency and control, accepting the risks of exclusion, surveillance, technostress, and latent ecological impacts; on the other hand, they can take on an active and transformative role, building infrastructures, practices, and visions capable of generating shared value, collective well-being, and systemic resilience. The digital transition poses a multitude of risks that must be addressed in a clear and systemic manner. The primary concern is the risk of exacerbating socio-technological inequalities through the widening of the digital divide, which has a greater impact

on individuals with fewer skills, access, or relational capital. It is important to note that there are several factors that must be considered in this regard. Firstly, there has been a considerable erosion of privacy. Secondly, there has been an expansion of forms of algorithmic surveillance in the workplace. Thirdly, there has been a spread of technostress. Finally, there is a growing dependence on opaque and monopolistic infrastructures. From an ecological perspective, the advent of DTs has had a profound impact on energy consumption, the utilization of rare resources, and the generation of electronic waste. These developments have also given rise to extractive logics that have extended to the cognitive and relational sphere. At the organizational level, there is also the risk of technocratic governance, focused on quantitative metrics, automated decision-making, and weak leadership, incapable of responding to the social and ethical complexity of digital innovation. Nevertheless, in addition to these risks, digitalization also offers extraordinary opportunities to build a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable future. Technologies have the capacity to support the empowerment of workers, enable new models of cooperation and learning, improve energy efficiency, promote transparency in decision-making processes, and stimulate the creation of regenerative value. It has been demonstrated that, when designed and governed with care, competence, and a systemic vision, they can also enable service personalization, democratic participation, and organizational resilience. In view of the aforementioned points, it is possible to propose an organizational agenda that is both sustainable and digital. This agenda would be capable of addressing the aforementioned challenges with strategic consistency and ethical sensitivity. Firstly, it is imperative to advocate for the promotion of digitalization as a human-centric process, predicated upon a value-driven vision that prioritizes the dignity of labour, the quality of relationships, and the preservation of the ecological context. This necessitates a critical evaluation of business models, which must transcend the paradigm of maximized efficiency to incorporate social, ecological, and ethical objectives. Secondly, it is incumbent upon organizations to invest in an inclusive, accessible, and pluralistic digital culture that values diversity and reduces barriers to innovation. It is imperative that the promotion of digital skills, the right to connectivity, the adoption of accessibility standards, and the active involvement of stakeholders become ingrained components of corporate policies. Thirdly, the governance of technological innovation must be made transparent, participatory, and accountable. This process entails the integration of digital impact assessment instruments, including digital ESG and AI governance frameworks, alongside the development of specific indicators for technological sustainability. Furthermore, regular reporting on digital choices is imperative to ensure the effective management of digital sustainability. Fourthly, leadership must evolve towards transformative, empathetic, and systemic forms capable of guiding change with vision and integrity,

facilitating continuous learning, critical thinking, and cross-functional collaboration. It is imperative to adopt a regenerative approach to innovation that transcends linear and extractive logic, embracing circular, ethical, and generative models of social, environmental, and human value. In terms of research and action, new paths are opening up that require interdisciplinary and transformative commitment. There is an urgent need to develop methods and tools to assess the socio-environmental impact of DTs in an integrated manner, considering both direct and systemic, latent and long-term effects. It is also necessary to explore the relationship among AI, organizational governance, and social justice, studying how algorithmic choices influence the dynamics of inclusion, representation, and recognition. Another promising area of research concerns the analysis of digital cultures and symbolic power devices, through which narratives, imaginaries, and legitimations of technology are constructed within organizations (Susskind, 2020). Finally, it is imperative to experiment with alternative models of digital innovation based on co-design, technological commons, cooperative platforms, participatory design, and feminist, decolonial, and ecological approaches to engineering and technological governance (Costanza-Chock, 2020). These models must be systematically documented, analysed, and brought into constructive dialogue with public policies and mainstream business practices so that they can spread alternative and systemic paradigms of sustainability. In summary, the establishment of a paradigm of integrated digital sustainability necessitates a cultural, organizational, and political paradigm shift. The issue at hand is not merely adapting existing technologies or merely following transient digital trends; rather, it is about orchestrating this transition in a deliberate, conscientious, and restorative manner. The challenge is not of a technical nature but rather an anthropological and institutional one. It pertains to the kind of future we aspire to construct, the meaning we attribute to progress, and the criteria by which we define what is right, desirable, and sustainable. Organizations, as strategic nodes in the social and economic network, have the opportunity – and the responsibility – to be agents of this change, integrating the principle of care, a vision of complexity, and consistency between means and ends into their daily practices. In this sense, integrated digital sustainability is not a goal to be achieved but rather an open, dynamic, and participatory process that calls for the convergence of knowledge, power, and the will to transform.

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3 The Digitization of Emotions

New Challenges for Organizations

Vincenzo Auriemma

3.1 Introduction

In the contemporary era, digitalization has become one of the most pervasive and profound transformations that organizations are facing. While it has facilitated the streamlined reorganization of production and communication processes, it has concomitantly engendered novel forms of complexity that exert an influence on even the most ephemeral aspects of the work experience: emotions. The advent of the "digitization of emotions" – that is, the mediation, analysis, and technological management of affective states in organizational contexts – poses a significant challenge to our understanding of the nature of social interactions in contemporary work, the emergent psychosocial risks associated with technology, and the implications for organizational sustainability. The increasing focus on the role of emotions in professional settings is not a novel development. Hochschild's seminal 1983 study marked the inception of research into emotional labour, with subsequent studies identifying the significance of affective involvement in professional relationships, particularly within relationship-intensive sectors. However, the prevailing paradigm is undergoing a radical transformation, characterized by the advent of digital tools that facilitate the capture, processing, monitoring, and even prediction of these emotions. Technologies such as AI, biometric sensors, digital communication platforms, and sentiment analysis software are redefining not only how emotions are expressed but also how they are coded and used by organizations (McStay, 2018). This process of digitizing emotions is concomitant with several structural transformations, including remote working, growing human–machine interaction, the culture of continuous performance, and the need for sustainable psychosocial well-being. In this context, the concept of technostress (defined as a form of distress specifically induced by the intensive and pervasive use of DTs) takes on central importance (Tarafdar et al., 2007; Ayyagari et al., 2011). The phenomenon of technostress has been demonstrated to exert a detrimental effect on the mental and physical health of workers. In addition,

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it has the capacity to erode social relationships within organizations and impede innovation. In the transition from analogue to digital work, emotions are increasingly subject to algorithmic evaluation. Digital platforms are not impartial entities; rather, they are characterized by the implementation of control, surveillance, and performance optimization logics that exert a direct influence on individuals' emotional lives (Zuboff, 2019). The dynamics of synchronous and asynchronous communication, hyperconnectivity, expectations of constant availability, and emotional metrics (e.g. emojis, instant feedback, or customer satisfaction scores) contribute to the creation of a work environment where emotional authenticity is constantly negotiated and sometimes sacrificed. A pivotal element of this transition pertains to the concept of "emotion-as-data," signifying the potential for translating affective states into quantifiable and computable signals through the utilization of wearable technologies, webcams equipped with facial recognition systems, or applications that analyse vocal prosody. While these tools promise to improve communication, prevent burn-out, and optimize productivity, they also raise significant ethical questions related to privacy, affective surveillance, reduced autonomy, and behavioural manipulation (Nass & Moon, 2000; Lupton, 2016). Moreover, the digitization of emotions necessitates a redefinition of the competencies required of workers. The contemporary business environment has evolved to demand a new form of "digital emotional intelligence" that encompasses the ability to comprehend and modulate digitally mediated emotions, decipher non-verbal signals in virtual environments, and establish trusting relationships through screens and interfaces (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017). From an organizational perspective, this necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of leadership models, internal communication systems, HRM practices, and performance evaluation methodologies. It is imperative for leaders to cultivate competencies in deciphering emotional dynamics in digital environments, to champion active and inclusive listening practices, and to discern indications of stress and discomfort, even when they are not overtly apparent (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017). In this intricate scenario, the present chapter endeavours to explore three primary directions: The technologies and practices that mediate and digitize emotions in the contemporary organizational context will be analysed, including hybrid work platforms, emotion recognition software, and affective AI systems. A study is required to investigate the effects of the digitization of emotions on the psychosocial well-being of workers, the organizational climate, and the relational dynamics among colleagues, leaders, and teams. A critical reflection on the ethical, cultural, and regulatory challenges that are emerging from this new scenario is required, with a particular focus on the sustainability of digital emotional practices in the medium to long term. The overarching objective of this study is to contribute to a more articulated and critical understanding of the emotional

transformation taking place in digital work, offering theoretical and practical insights into a more empathetic, aware, and sustainable organization.

3.2 Emotional Capital and Organizational Life in the Digital Era

In the context of technological and social transformations affecting the world of work, the concept of "emotional capital" emerges as a fundamental theoretical and practical lens for understanding the affective dynamics that take place within organizations. Emotional capital can be defined as the set of emotional resources shared by an organizational collective, which contribute to building cohesion, trust, motivation, and a sense of belonging (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006; Gendron, 2004). This capital, frequently imperceptible yet indispensable, constitutes a pivotal element of an organization's social and symbolic capital, functioning as a catalyst for performance and long-term sustainability. In the contemporary digitalized workplace, emotional capital is not only a pertinent concept, but it also assumes novel forms. The manner in which emotions are expressed, shared, and managed is profoundly influenced by information and communication technologies (ICT), which increasingly mediate everyday interactions. In this scenario, the affective dimension becomes intertwined with the digital dimension, thereby giving rise to new forms of emotional labour and new risks, such as emotional alienation, affective dissonance, and compromised authenticity (Hochschild, 1983; Grandey, 2003). Emotions represent an integral component of the working environment. These factors have been demonstrated to exert a significant influence on various aspects of organizational behaviour, including decision-making processes, the motivation of individuals, the dynamics of cooperation and leadership, the quality of customer care services, and the management of interpersonal conflicts (Ashkanasy et al., 2017). Historically, organizations have sought to regulate their employees' emotions through behavioural codes, implicit and explicit norms, training, and leadership models. The advent of the post-Fordist paradigm, coupled with the mounting emphasis on services, has rendered the capacity to articulate suitable emotions a pivotal skill, particularly within customer-facing sectors. Nevertheless, the advent of the digital age has precipitated a radical transformation in the context of emotional expression. Interactions mediated by a screen have been shown to reduce non-verbal communication, thereby requiring greater awareness and skill in interpreting reduced cues. Furthermore, digital platforms have been shown to engender novel, frequently implicit, emotional norms pertaining to such domains as timeliness, politeness, constant positivity, and emotional availability. In this context, emotional labour not only persists but also intensifies and becomes more complicated. The concept of emotional labour, as introduced by Hochschild

(1983), refers to the effort required to manage emotions in accordance with the emotional rules prescribed by the job role. In a digitalized world, this endeavour is fragmented and distributed across a multitude of digital micro-interactions, including emails, video conferences, instant messages, symbolic reactions (emojis, likes, and emotional badges), and automated feedback. These tools have the potential to augment opportunities for emotional labour yet concomitantly engender greater complexity in terms of control and monitoring. For instance, in the context of a virtual meeting facilitated by Zoom, the absence of physical interaction necessitates a greater investment of effort to demonstrate attentiveness, engagement, and enthusiasm. In such circumstances, facial and vocal reactions become of paramount importance, with the microphone and camera serving as instruments for the regulation of emotion. Nadler (2020) contends that "Zoom fatigue" is not only a physical or cognitive phenomenon but also an emotional one. It is becoming evident that organizations are beginning to recognize the importance of managing digital emotions. The provision of training on digital empathy, emotional awareness in virtual environments, and the strategic use of communication tools is becoming increasingly prevalent. Concurrently, novel forms of emotional control are emerging. These include facial and voice recognition software that analyses emotional tone, HR tools that monitor employee sentiment through corporate social media, and continuous feedback platforms that incorporate emotional metrics (McStay, 2018).

3.3 Emotional Intelligence and Digital Skills: A New Alliance

In the contemporary context, EI can no longer be considered in isolation from digital skills. The ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own and others' emotions must be integrated with the ability to navigate complex digital environments, interpret reduced emotional cues, and maintain empathy and authenticity in virtual spaces (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). The advent of "digital emotional intelligence" signifies the augmentation of the conventional dimensions of EI (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills) to virtual environments. This encompasses the ability to discern the emotional tone of a written message, recognize the appropriate timing for a reaction, establish trust without the aid of body language, and identify signs of discomfort through digital behaviours such as absences, delays, and disengagement. Research findings underscore the pivotal role of these competencies in digital leadership, remote collaborative work, conflict management in virtual teams, and psychological well-being. Recent developments in corporate training programmes have witnessed the integration of modules focusing on digital empathy, effective online communication, and emotion management in

hybrid environments (Sivunen et al., 2022). The combination of emotions and technologies creates scenarios that are both full of potential and ambiguous. The establishment of digital affective communities, the enhancement of a sense of belonging, and the optimization of communication quality are indeed attainable. Nevertheless, there exists a concomitant risk of emotion being reduced to data, of spontaneity being forsaken, and of workers being transformed into objects of incessant behavioural analysis. It is therefore essential that organizations critically reflect on how they integrate emotional technologies into their processes. This suggests that conscious governance of digital tools is imperative, with training focused on well-being and authenticity and the adoption of an ethic of care that acknowledges the centrality of emotions in organizational life (Tronto, 2013). In summary, emotional capital can be considered a strategic resource for organizations. However, in the digital age, its valorization requires new skills, new tools, and a new perspective. Emotions are not vestiges of the past to be neutralized through technological rationality; rather, they are vital dimensions that must be understood, respected, and cultivated. The combination of emotions and technologies creates scenarios that are not only full of potential but also full of uncertainty and contradictions in the system. The establishment of digital affective communities, the enhancement of a sense of belonging, and the optimization of communication quality are indeed attainable. Nevertheless, there exists a genuine possibility that emotion may be diminished to a series of computable data, which are then processed as an input/output variable within automated decision-making procedures. In numerous organizations, the digitization process has resulted in the standardization of communication practices, with the implementation of protocols and metrics that delineate the appropriate manner in which to articulate content, the time frame for its conveyance, and the medium through which to do so. This dynamic can give rise to a cultural milieu characterized by the predominance of "normative" emotional expressions, wherein spontaneity is often eclipsed by considerations of performance and the logic of relational branding. This is exemplified by the "performative emotions" that are often required in customer service, internal marketing campaigns, and digital charismatic leadership processes. In such cases, authenticity is frequently simulated in order to achieve consensus or efficiency. Such dynamics give rise to a growing tension between authenticity and adaptation. The concept of "augmented emotional dissonance" has been employed in certain studies (see Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Morris & Feldman, 1996). This term refers to a discrepancy between an individual's actual emotional state and the emotional expression required of them in their professional context. The use of digital devices has been identified as a factor that can amplify the visibility and traceability of emotional expressions, thereby intensifying the aforementioned discrepancy. The implicit obligation to maintain a positive and proactive attitude,

constantly exposed to the judgements of others through real-time feedback, has the potential to generate subtle but persistent forms of psychosocial stress and emotional exhaustion. Concurrently, the implementation of emotion measurement technologies, including emotion recognition software, biometric wearables, and sentiment analysis systems, engenders a profound interrogation of organizational ethics. These tools, despite being presented as functional for improving well-being or productivity, risk becoming mechanisms for controlling and disciplining workers' internal states, raising questions of affective biopolitics. It is therefore essential that organizations critically reflect on how they integrate emotional technologies into their processes. The concept of conscious governance necessitates a number of key principles. Firstly, there is a requirement for transparency regarding the tools utilized. Secondly, worker involvement in decision-making processes related to the collection and use of emotional data is essential. Thirdly, the establishment of a culture of trust based on authenticity rather than mere compliance is paramount. Furthermore, it is imperative that digital practices be evaluated in terms of their relational and symbolic impact, as opposed to merely their functional impact. From a training perspective, the promotion of a "culture of digital empathy" cannot be confined to the transfer of technical skills but must also stimulate ethical reflection and social intelligence. This necessitates the training of individuals to act responsibly in digital environments, to respect the emotional complexity of others, and to oppose affective exploitation. Finally, it is imperative to redefine organizational performance metrics to encompass qualitative and relational dimensions. The evaluation of the success of a digital culture should be conducted not only in terms of speed and productivity but also with regard to its capacity to promote authentic connections, prevent emotional distress, and establish psychologically safe work environments (Edmondson, 1999). A rethinking of organizational models in relational, ecological, and human terms is ultimately required if emotional capital is to be given proper value. Emotions are not vestiges of the past to be neutralized through technological rationality; rather, they are vital dimensions that must be understood, respected, and cultivated. Emotional capital is a strategic resource for organizations, but its valorization in the digital age requires new skills, new tools, and a new perspective. Emotions are not vestiges of the past to be neutralized through technological rationality; rather, they are vital dimensions that must be understood, respected, and cultivated.

3.4 Emotion AI and Algorithmic Governance of Emotions

Another fundamental concept that is increasingly emerging in today's society is that of emotional AI. Indeed, it is now well documented that a growing number of young people (approximately 75% of young Americans) have

an AI as a friend, according to the NGO Common Sense Media. Emotion AI, otherwise referred to as emotional AI, is defined as a subset of AI technologies that focus on the detection, interpretation, and response to human emotions. The technology utilizes biometric identification methods, natural language analysis, and facial, voice, and behavioural detection, with the objective of modelling machine responses in a manner that is empathetic or consistent with the emotional state of the human interlocutor (McStay, 2018; Picard, 1997). In the organizational sphere, these technologies are gradually penetrating various functional areas, transforming the way emotions are treated as a management and production resource. In the domain of human resources, Emotion AI is being utilized with increasing frequency in selection, onboarding, and performance evaluation processes. Emotion analysis software is designed to identify personality traits and emotional states that are considered desirable for specific job roles. This is achieved by analysing facial micro-expressions and vocal parameters in video interviews. In certain instances, continuous monitoring platforms facilitate real-time assessment of employee mood, thereby providing organizations with predictive tools for managing turnover, burn-out, and organizational climate (Eubanks, 2018). In the context of customer service and internal marketing, Emotion AI is employed to enhance customer interaction. For instance, chatbots and voice assistants have the capacity to adapt their responses according to the emotional tone perceived in the customer's voice. Sentiment analysis tools examine reviews, feedback, and comments on social media to identify emotional trends and respond promptly. In such contexts, the stated objective is to enhance the user experience by personalizing services in accordance with perceived emotions and optimizing relational interactions in terms of engagement and loyalty. Nevertheless, the increasing utilization of Emotion AI gives rise to a series of crucial ethical, epistemological, and organizational dilemmas. A significant concern pertains to the possibility of emotional manipulation. In circumstances where emotions are tracked and interpreted in real time, there is a risk that these data may be used for the intentional manipulation of the behaviour of workers or consumers. This development has given rise to a novel form of algorithmic persuasive influence, whereby emotions are not only monitored but also exploited for commercial or managerial purposes (Illouz, 2007; McStay, 2018). The concept of emotional capitalism, as delineated by Eva Illouz, assumes a pivotal role in this discourse. Illouz (2012) contends that emotions, once considered the domain of personal intimacy, have now become thoroughly intertwined with the circuits of consumption and production. Within this system, emotions are rationalized, calculated, and instrumentalized and are transformed into symbolic capital to be invested and exchanged. In this sense, emotion AI can be regarded as a tool for the intensification of affective capitalism. It is important to note that this is no longer limited to the representation or simulation

of emotions but rather geared towards their extraction, prediction, and engineering. From an organizational perspective, this phenomenon can be interpreted as the emergence of novel forms of emotional surveillance. Emotion AI technologies enable the observation of not only the actions of employees but also their emotions, or more precisely, the emotions presumed to be experienced by employees, based on algorithms that transform physiological and behavioural signals into predictive data. This form of surveillance can be considered particularly invasive due to its capacity to influence the emotional intimacy of the subject, without their full awareness or control over the algorithmic interpretation of their inner states (Andrejevic & Gates, 2014). The concept of "emotion-as-data" has the potential to engender a profound transformation in the grammar of working relationships. Emotions are no longer considered to be subjective experiences to be communicated or shared interpersonally; rather, they are regarded as flows of information that can be standardized and integrated into corporate information systems. This process of datafication reduces the complexity of emotional experience to a set of discrete variables that can be tracked and used for automated decision-making. The notion of Emotion AI being characterized by neutrality, scientificity, and efficiency is a common presentation. However, this presentation often obscures a form of affective rationalization that poses a risk of dehumanizing working relationships (Barrett, 2017). A particularly problematic consequence of this phenomenon pertains to the realm of automated decision-making processes that are predicated on emotional data. When emotions become a metric for evaluation in the context of hiring, promotion, dismissal, or task allocation, a performative logic is introduced in which emotionality itself becomes the object of discipline and conformity. Furthermore, a substantial body of research has demonstrated that emotional recognition algorithms are susceptible to cultural, racial, and gender biases, thereby raising concerns regarding the reliability and fairness of the decisions they produce (O'Neil, 2016; Noble, 2018). This transformation necessitates a comprehensive theoretical and practical response. Firstly, it is imperative to acknowledge that emotions are neither universal nor fully interpretable by machines. As argued by Lisa Feldman Barrett (2017), emotions are not predefined biological entities but rather social and cultural constructs, dependent on context and interpretation. This suggests that any endeavour to reduce them to unambiguous signs readable by an algorithm may result in errors, misunderstandings, and systemic injustices. Secondly, the governance of Emotion AI must be ethical and be based on the principles of transparency, human control, accountability, and participation. It is incumbent upon organizations to ensure that workers are informed of the use of emotional technologies, that they are involved in decision-making processes that affect them, and that the use of affective data does not compromise the dignity, autonomy, and privacy of individuals. In this regard, the

introduction of supranational regulatory instruments governing the use of Emotion AI in the workplace is recommended, with a model similar to that of the European GDPR or recent proposals in the AI Act being considered. Finally, there is a need for critical reflection on the meaning of emotion in organizations. Emotions are not merely impediments or functional resources but rather constitute a constitutive dimension of subjectivity, relationships, and the meaning of work. The preservation of this dimension necessitates organizational practices that prioritize listening, authenticity, mutual recognition, and relational responsibility. These elements are challenging to replicate or substitute with automated systems. In conclusion, Emotion AI can be regarded as a paradigmatic challenge for the future of organizations. This paradigm shift necessitates a redefinition of the boundaries between human and technological, private and public, and spontaneity and predictability. It is only through critical, inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue that a use of emotional AI which does not sacrifice human complexity on the altar of algorithmic efficiency can be imagined.

3.5 Emotion AI and Emotional Capitalism: Towards an Automated Affective Economy

The integration of Emotion AI into contemporary organizational practices can only be understood in its full scope in light of a broader cultural and systemic paradigm: that of emotional capitalism. Eva Illouz (2007, 2012), a pre-eminent scholar of the transformation of emotions into economic and symbolic capital, has demonstrated how the affective sphere, once considered the domain of intimacy, has been progressively colonized by market logic (Illouz, 2012). In this process, emotions not only are mobilized to promote consumption – as in advertising messages – but also become actual technologies for governing individuals, both inside and outside organizations. Emotion AI represents the technological phase of this affective rationalization. In the past, emotions were the subject of relational interpretation or behavioural training. However, in the contemporary era, they are "read" by algorithms through biometric signals, facial expressions, tone of voice, or textual data. This development signifies a shift from a discursive management of emotions to a computational management, where affectivity is reduced to quantifiable and potentially monetizable information. As Illouz has observed, this operation implies a form of objectification and depoliticization of feeling, which is emptied of its experiential density and reinserted into the flows of economic value. The integration of Emotion AI systems within organizational structures enables entities to consolidate their oversight of personnel, encompassing both their actions and, by inference, their presumed emotional states. The process of emotional datification has the potential to transform work interactions into sites of value extraction,

thereby generating novel forms of performative pressure. In contemporary organizations, employees are no longer merely expected to execute tasks but rather to do so in a state of optimal emotional well-being. This emotional state is detected, evaluated, and stored in an automated system for future reference. In this paradigm, emotional authenticity is no longer regarded as a stand-alone objective but rather as a performance, that is, to be replicated and optimized. This novel affective regime signifies an augmentation of the "attention economy" towards an "emotional intensity economy," in which emotions – measured, predicted, and classified – emerge as pivotal assets for generating corporate value. As Illouz pertinently observes, the process of capitalization of emotions does not occur in a neutral space but rather within the confines of structures of power, inequality, and information asymmetry. Those who control the technological infrastructure of Emotion AI also exercise epistemic power over what counts as "true emotion," who is considered authentic, and how affective normality is defined. In the context of algorithmic emotional capitalism, emotions have emerged as a pivotal aspect for the extraction, classification, and profit generation processes. However, this radical rationalization also carries with it the risk of depersonalization, discrimination, and alienation. Should AI be permitted to determine who is empathetic, who is stressed, and who is suitable for promotion, based on opaque statistical models, there is a risk that existing stereotypes and inequalities will be consolidated, masked by the appearance of scientific objectivity. It is imperative for an ethically responsible organization to acknowledge these implications. It is imperative to cultivate a culture of affective resistance, one that is capable of recognizing the immeasurable value of human emotional experience. This entails the rejection of the complete delegation of subjectivity management to machines, the acknowledgement of the importance of listening and human negotiation in organizational decisions, and the recognition that not everything that is measurable is therefore legitimately measured. It is only through such a paradigm shift that we can envision a future in which technological advancements serve to enhance, rather than diminish, the affective intricacies inherent in organizational life.

3.6 Digitalization and the Transformation of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture, defined as the aggregate of values, norms, practices, and symbols shared among members of an organization (Schein, 2010), is one of the aspects most impacted by digitalization. The advent of hybrid and remote working models has precipitated a profound metamorphosis in the nature of interpersonal relationships, communication channels, and the emotional climate within organizations. While technology has facilitated unparalleled operational flexibility, it has also contributed to the redefined

expression, interpretation, and management of emotions in the workplace. In virtual environments, communication is mediated by digital platforms that filter and transform emotional expressions. The advent of video conferencing, corporate chat rooms, instant messaging systems, and collaborative platforms has precipitated a gradual replacement of face-to-face interactions, thereby giving rise to new forms of affective interaction. However, the absence of physical proximity leads to a reduction in non-verbal cues, such as body language, tone of voice, and eye contact, which are fundamental to empathy and mutual recognition (Derks et al., 2008). This phenomenon can result in an "emotional disconnection," whereby the augmentation of communication channels does not necessarily correspond to an enhancement in the quality of interpersonal relationships. This paradox, which can be termed "emotional disconnection in the hyperconnected era," poses a significant challenge for contemporary organizations. The contemporary workplace is characterized by pervasive connectivity yet concomitant emotional disconnection among employees. The absence of informal interactions, the rigidity of digital tools, the cognitive fatigue resulting from prolonged screen use (Zoom fatigue), and the pressure to maintain a constant online presence contribute to a widespread sense of emotional distancing (Nadler, 2020). In this context, the role of organizational leadership becomes strategic in nature with regard to the management of the emotional climate. It is incumbent upon leaders to cultivate new competencies to facilitate the comprehension and regulation of employees' emotions in digital environments. It is imperative that they are able to engender trust, forge close bonds, and cultivate cohesion through modes of interaction that transcend mere communicative efficiency. Such endeavours must encompass the cultivation of active listening, the utilization of symbolic rituals, and the provision of relational care (Goleman et al., 2013). The digital transformation of organizational culture necessitates a re-evaluation of collective rituals, identity symbols, and spaces for socialization. In the absence of shared physical spaces, it becomes imperative to establish "digital emotional spaces" that facilitate the expression of emotions, the sharing of experiences, and the cultivation of a sense of belonging among workers. This encompasses, for instance, the valuation of informal virtual moments, the facilitation of collective storytelling, and the promotion of practices of symbolic and affective recognition (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000). Moreover, digital organizational culture is distinguished by elevated levels of visibility and traceability of behaviour. It is important to note that each interaction is potentially subject to being recorded, analysed and evaluated. This phenomenon can exert contradictory effects, simultaneously promoting transparency and accountability while concomitantly engendering performance anxiety, self-censorship, and conformist pressure. In this scenario, emotions risk becoming "disciplined" by algorithms and metrics, resulting in a reduction of spontaneity and authenticity (Han,

2017). In order to address these challenges, it is necessary to develop a digital culture of care that recognizes the value of emotions in the workplace and promotes their sustainable and authentic expression. This suggests that organizational policies which attend to emotional well-being, spaces for collective reflection, and empathetic leadership which can facilitate emotional dialogue are necessary. It is imperative to acknowledge that this approach is instrumental in facilitating the development of digital environments that are not only efficient but also human-centric. In conclusion, the digitization of organizational culture is not a neutral or purely technical process but rather one that is deeply affective and symbolic. The new relational paradigm that is required is one based on emotional awareness, affective justice, and relational governance. The latter is to be understood as a value that is placed on humanity in technologically mediated interactions.

3.7 Towards a Sustainable Emotional Ecology

In the contemporary context, characterized by the increasing digitization of work processes, there is a strong need to design digital environments that respect the emotional authenticity and well-being of workers. Digital transformation has been shown to engender a number of advantages in terms of flexibility, efficiency, and scalability. However, it has concomitantly introduced new complexities in the management of emotional dynamics within organizations. Technology-mediated interaction and the growing adoption of behavioural and emotional monitoring tools raise questions about the affective sustainability of digital environments. The notion of "emotional ecology" in an organizational context can be delineated as the aggregate of practices, environments, norms, and technologies that regulate the expression, recognition, and valorization of emotions in the workplace (Pereira, 2016). The concept of ecology necessitates a systemic and relational approach, in which emotions are not only individual functions but also elements co-constructed within a sociotechnical ecosystem. From this standpoint, sustainable emotional ecology is defined as a system that safeguards the diversity, genuineness, and unrestrained flow of emotions, thereby averting manifestations of fatigue, instrumentalization, and excessive regulation. In order to establish such an ecology, it is incumbent upon organizations to adopt an ethical design of their digital environments. This encompasses the deliberate selection of technological platforms, the delineation of spaces conducive to non-judgemental emotional expression, the safeguarding of affective privacy, and the integration of relational dimensions into digital processes. For instance, virtual meetings should not be exclusively oriented towards productivity but should also incorporate ritual moments of human interaction. Feedback platforms should facilitate both empathetic and evaluative communication. Monitoring software should not over-emphasize the

automated reading of affective signals but should be balanced by human and participatory mediation. The establishment of a sustainable emotional ecology is predicated on the occurrence of cultural change. It is imperative for organizations to acknowledge that emotional well-being is not only an ancillary benefit but also an indispensable condition that fosters creativity, cooperation, and resilience. This suggests the implementation of policies designed to promote psychosocial well-being, the dissemination of peer care practices, and the valorization of emotionally competent leadership. Furthermore, it is essential to counteract the logic of affective performativity – that is to say, the pressure to display "right" emotions according to organizational standards – which reduces subjective complexity to an adaptive and strategic spectacle (Illouz, 2007). Another fundamental aspect of sustainable emotional ecology is the implementation of training programmes. It is imperative that skills development programmes encompass emotional education, digital empathy, affective regulation in virtual environments, and the capacity to provide and receive feedback in a constructive and relational manner. In this sense, training should not be understood merely as the transmission of content but as a transformative practice that helps workers understand, rework, and integrate their emotional experiences into their daily work (Goleman, 1995). Finally, regulatory control has an essential role to play. The governance of emotional technologies must be predicated on clear ethical principles, namely transparency, informed consent, privacy protection, and fair access to emotional resources. At the institutional level, regulatory authorities must intervene to prevent the misuse of Emotion AI, biometric tracking, and automated emotion management. The impending European regulation on AI (AI Act) signifies a pivotal opportunity to establish explicit limitations on the implementation of affective technologies within the workplace, thereby acknowledging emotions as a collective good that necessitates protection. In summary, the establishment of a sustainable ecology of emotions in the digital workplace necessitates a transition from an extractive logic to a generative logic of emotions. This necessitates a re-evaluation of organizational models that extends beyond functional considerations, encompassing relational, affective, and ethical dimensions. It is imperative to recognize that the foremost aspect of this matter is the re-establishment of the emotional dignity of individuals at the core of the organization. This is considered to be an indispensable condition for the establishment of an organization that is genuinely inclusive, responsible, and sustainable.

3.8 Conclusion

The digitization of emotions is widely regarded as one of the most complex, yet pivotal, challenges that organizations are likely to face in the future. The analysis developed in this chapter demonstrates that the integration of DTs

and the affective sphere is not a neutral or purely technical process. Rather, it engenders profound transformations in organizational culture, leadership models, communication processes, and, most significantly, working subjectivity. In this scenario, emotions are not merely private experiences or interpersonal expressions; they become pivotal elements in performance building, value generation, and behaviour regulation. The advent of digitization, facilitated by tools such as Emotion AI, mediated communication, and remote work platforms, has rendered the measurement, management, and monitoring of emotions on a previously unparalleled scale attainable. While this process promises greater efficiency, personalization, and responsiveness, it also exposes us to significant risks. These include the reduction of emotions to data, the loss of spontaneity, affective alienation, and the commodification of relationships. In this context, a critical reflection on the very concept of work subjectivity, increasingly shaped by algorithmic metrics, performance expectations, and normative emotional standards, is required. In the context of digital work, subjectivity encompasses not only the production of content but also the subjective experience of the user. The culture of hyper-connection, the utilization of sentiment analysis tools, emotion management training, and organizational climate assessments through digital dashboards all contribute to the development of a model of the emotionally optimized, responsive, and adaptable worker. However, it is important to consider what is lost in this process. The question therefore arises as to what extent there is space for dissent, ambivalence, and the unspoken. The objective of this study is to ascertain the subjective cost of emotional transparency. In light of these questions, it is incumbent upon organizations to reflect upon the emotional culture they wish to cultivate. The discussion of employee well-being, engagement, and happiness in terms of KPIs is insufficient in itself. It is imperative to acknowledge the affective dimension as an ethical and relational space that cannot be reduced to performance logic. It is imperative to acknowledge this fundamental recognition to facilitate the establishment of sustainable digital environments that can seamlessly integrate efficiency and humanism, control and compassion, and technology and dignity. In order to facilitate progress in this area, three primary research and action directions are recommended for future consideration: This text presents an interdisciplinary array of insights, integrating organizational studies, social theory, emotion psychology, and the philosophy of technology. The objective is to comprehensively explore the implications of affective digitalization. The organization's experiments concentrate on the ecology of emotions by means of innovative relational design practices, the establishment of emotional climates through co-construction, and participatory governance models. The present paper sets out the regulatory initiatives and public policies that are currently under discussion, with a view to the ethical regulation of Emotion AI, the protection of affective

privacy, and the promotion of digitally fair and affectively sustainable work. In conclusion, the future of organizational sustainability also – and perhaps above all – depends on the ability to manage emotions not as a resource to be optimized but as a terrain for the humanization of work. The challenge confronting us in the future is to establish organizations that are capable of navigating emotional complexity without diminishing it, that can integrate technology without dehumanizing, and that can prioritize authenticity without exploiting it. In summary, the objective is to transform digitalization into an opportunity to radically rethink the way we live, feel, and build work.

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4 Change Management and Technostress

Caterina Galdiero and Rosario Marrapodi

4.1 Introduction

Digital transformation is regarded as one of the most significant and intricate forces in the evolution of organizations. From the Industrial Revolution to the present Information Age, each epoch has redefined the relationship among people, technologies, and work. However, the present era is distinctive in that change has never before been so rapid, interconnected, and far-reaching. ICTs are no longer merely functional or sector-specific tools; they constitute the cognitive and social infrastructure through which value is produced, decisions are made, and organizational identities are constructed. Consequently, digitalization should not be regarded as a mere series of technical innovations but rather as an anthropological transformation that impacts modes of thinking, relating, and working. In this scenario, change management and the study of technostress emerge as two inseparable perspectives for understanding the sustainability of contemporary work. In recent decades, the nature of work has undergone profound transformations, and concomitantly, the spaces and modalities through which work is performed have also changed, posing new challenges for both employees and employers. The advent of novel technologies has resulted in a shift not only in the composition of the workforce but also in the manner, timing, and location of work activities (Sparks et al., 2001; Dewe & Cooper, 2012). The advent of advanced communication technologies has engendered greater flexibility and mobility for workers (Dewe & Cooper, 2012), yielding not only numerous positive outcomes but also a range of negative consequences. This increased flexibility must be balanced against the intensified use of technology in daily work practices, which, while dissolving the boundaries of the traditional office, simultaneously increases workloads and accelerates work rhythms (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010), with potential negative effects on employee well-being (Redman et al., 2009). The evolution of work practices has been characterized by incremental rather than radical transformation, often driven by pragmatic considerations rather

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than visionary objectives (Morris & Evans, 2004; Ezzamel et al., 2012). Despite Morris and Evans (2004) assertion that change may not always be transformative, the evidence of its global impact on workplaces remains indisputable. The implications of these transformations are highly relevant for human resource professionals. These professionals must recognize the indispensable role of technology in modern work practices. They must also design new strategies to preserve and manage employee stress, emotions, and well-being. According to the latest European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound), there has been a substantial increase in the number of workers using DTs in recent years. The ongoing global pandemic of Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and the subsequent transition to remote working have further emphasized this trend (De et al., 2020), resulting in an unprecedented number of workers reliant on DT for their daily professional tasks. The employment of DT has served to obfuscate the conventional boundaries that delineate the spheres of work and private life. The nature of work has evolved to extend beyond the confines of physical workplaces, with employees maintaining connectivity through digital devices outside of working hours. The phenomenon of constant connectivity has been demonstrated to exacerbate the work–life conflict, thereby reducing opportunities for psychological recovery (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Dragano & Lunau, 2020). This has been shown to have a detrimental effect on well-being, with higher levels of anxiety, fatigue, and burn-out being observed (Dragano & Lunau, 2020). This phenomenon is often even more pronounced for remote workers, particularly when telework is not a voluntary choice but rather a mandatory organizational arrangement. It is evident that DT offer numerous advantages in terms of enhancing various aspects of daily life. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the potential adverse effects that may arise from their utilization, particularly with regard to employee well-being (Day et al., 2012; Gaudioso et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2016; Tarafdar et al., 2007; Johari et al., 2020). This issue remains the subject of extensive debate, as technology has been identified as both an emerging source of occupational stress and a convenient tool for organizational efficiency. The critical boundary in this context is the capacity to manage technological pervasiveness. If uncontrolled, this can itself become a source of strain. The true essence of technostress resides in the stress experienced by users when interacting with DT (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). The extant scientific literature identifies five main dimensions of technostress (Tarafdar et al., 2007; La Torre et al., 2018). The phenomenon of techno-overload can be defined as the compulsion imposed on employees by their employers to work at an accelerated pace and for extended periods. This is often driven by the adoption of DTs, which can invade an individual's personal life, rendering employees perpetually accessible and unable to disengage from professional obligations. Techno-invasion, on the other hand,

can be understood as the sense of inadequacy experienced by employees due to their limited digital proficiency. This can lead to a perceived threat to job security, as employees feel vulnerable in the face of technological advancements that might potentially replace their roles. Finally, techno-uncertainty refers to the anxiety and stress that can arise from the constant updates and changes in digital systems, which can create a sense of unpredictability and uncertainty in the workplace.

4.2 Technostress

The notion of technostress first emerged during the 1980s, a period which witnessed a marked increase in the integration of computers into office and administrative environments. Craig Brod (1984) was among the first to describe it as a "modern disease of adaptation," emphasizing how exposure to new technologies could generate anxiety, frustration, and alienation (Brod, 1984). However, it was not until the early 2000s that research on technology-related stress acquired a more systematic theoretical framework, largely due to the contributions of Tarafdar et al. (2007, 2008). These authors introduced an analytical distinction among different stress-inducing factors – techno-stressors – whose classification remains a key theoretical reference to this day. The framework underpinning this study encompasses the concepts of techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-complexity, techno-insecurity, and techno-uncertainty, which collectively encapsulate the predominant pressures emanating from the utilization of DT within organizational settings. The term "techno-overload" refers to the perceived increase in work demands caused by technologies. The use of email, instant messaging systems, collaborative platforms, and continuous digital information flows creates a condition of hyperconnectivity, where employees are faced with constant demands for immediate responses. The concept of techno-invasion pertains to the dissolution of boundaries between professional and personal domains. The perpetual accessibility facilitated by smartphones and mobile networks serves to obfuscate the conventional distinctions between work hours and leisure time. The concept of techno-complexity, which is defined as the difficulty of understanding and using increasingly sophisticated tools, is intrinsically linked to the necessity of continuous skill development. Techno-insecurity is defined as the fear of being replaced or marginalized by new technologies or of being unable to keep pace with evolving learning requirements. Finally, techno-uncertainty denotes the sense of instability caused by incessant updates of digital systems, procedures, and interfaces – where nothing can ever be mastered definitively. It is rare for these five factors to act in isolation; instead, they interact dynamically, shaping performance, motivation, and well-being. Tarafdar et al. (2007, 2008) demonstrated empirically that techno-stressors

lead not only to individual outcomes, such as fatigue, cynicism, or reduced job satisfaction, but also to measurable organizational effects, including productivity decline, turnover, and relational conflict. Subsequent research has expanded this framework by linking technostress to models such as JD–R (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and person–environment fit (Edwards, 1996). From these perspectives, stress can be understood as arising from a misalignment between the demands of the work environment and the cognitive, emotional, and organizational resources available to the individual. The amplification of demands without a concomitant augmentation of resources engenders imbalance, giving rise to tension, anxiety, and diminished coping capacity. Work-related stress is a significant and costly phenomenon, as it has the capacity to impair performance and, when chronic, can result in severe health complications. In the contemporary workplace, characterized by the pervasive integration of DTs, a novel form of occupational stress has emerged: technostress. The health of the active workforce is increasingly threatened by stressful work environments (Schnall et al., 2016; Siegrist & Wahrendorf, 2016). Occupational stress is now widely acknowledged as one of the predominant psychosocial risks in the workplace. According to Eurostat (2019), stress represents the second most common health problem among workers, after musculoskeletal disorders. The repercussions of occupational stress are manifold, exerting a detrimental influence on both the individual and the organizational entity. On a personal level, this can manifest in a decline in health and an overall reduction in quality of life. From an organizational perspective, the consequences encompass absenteeism, diminished productivity, and elevated rates of staff turnover. The post-pandemic context, marked by significant transformations in work organization (e.g. modified workloads, extended working hours, diminished autonomy, and augmented social isolation), has further exacerbated these challenges. Hassard et al. (2018) estimated that productivity losses account for 70–90% of the total cost of work-related stress, with health and medical costs constituting the remaining 10–30%. A substantial body of research has indicated that employees who report elevated levels of occupational stress are more susceptible to the development of mental and physical disorders, including depression, anxiety, hypertension, and heart disease (ILO, 2016). It is well-documented that chronic exposure to stressors, in combination with a low socioeconomic status or pre-existing vulnerability to mental illness, can result in an elevated risk of developing cardiovascular disease or diabetes. Prolonged exposure to stress has been shown to deplete workers' emotional, physical, and mental resources (Shirom, 2003), potentially leading to emotional exhaustion and a diminished ability to engage meaningfully in their work (Schaufeli et al., 2009). This, in turn, has been shown to trigger the affective–behavioural response known as burn-out. Furthermore, stress has been demonstrated to increase susceptibility to depression (Yoshizawa

et al., 2016), workplace accidents (Kim et al., 2016), and other occupational risks. Consequently, a considerable number of European countries have observed an increase in mental health-related illnesses, absenteeism, and early retirement (European Framework for Action on Mental Health and Well-being, 2016). As demonstrated in the research by Beck et al. (2011), even mild symptoms of depression have been shown to be associated with a loss of productivity. Furthermore, the loss of highly skilled employees due to poor health can impose additional recruitment and training costs on employers (McDaid, 2007). The phenomenon of sickness absence has been demonstrated to have a deleterious effect on team members, resulting in an increase in their workload and the potential initiation of new cycles of occupational stress. In addition to the issue of absenteeism, organizations must also address presenteeism, which is defined as reduced performance caused by psychological or physical discomfort at work (Aronsson et al., 2000). Ayyagari et al. (2011) further advanced this line of thinking by proposing a theoretical model identifying the technological antecedents of job stress. The argument is made that the characteristics of ICT, in particular their pervasiveness, dynamism, and interactivity, engender new cognitive demands that disrupt the balance between perceived control and mental workload. It is an established fact that as technology becomes more complex and invasive, workers experience a loss of control over their tasks. This dynamic engenders a pernicious cycle of continuous learning, fear of inadequacy, and an inability to disengage from professional obligations, thereby resulting in chronic strain. In this sense, technostress must be regarded as a structural condition of digital work, rather than an anomaly.

4.3 The Digital as a Source of Change

Digitalization, however, is not only a source of discomfort, but it also represents a powerful driver of learning and transformation. Change management has traditionally been defined as the set of strategies and processes through which an organization plans, manages, and consolidates change. From Lewin's (1951) foundational unfreeze–change–refreeze model to more recent systemic approaches, attention has shifted from viewing change as a linear event to conceiving it as a permanent condition. In the contemporary digital landscape, organizations are perpetually undergoing a state of flux, characterized by incremental rather than radical transformation. This phenomenon is precipitated by the incessant emergence of novel tools, information flows, and models of collaboration. The implementation of change management, therefore, becomes an ongoing organizational competence – a dynamic adaptation process in which success depends on maintaining equilibrium between innovation and well-being. Within this theoretical framework, the task–technology fit theory (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995),

subsequently revisited and expanded by Vendramin, Nardelli, and Ipsen in *A Handbook of Theories on Designing Alignment Between People and the Office Environment* (Appel-Meulenbroek & Danivska, 2021), offers a crucial contribution to the field. From this standpoint, the creation of value by technology is predicated upon the congruence between its characteristics and the demands of the tasks as well as the capabilities of the individuals who utilize it. When the fit is high, technology facilitates effectiveness and learning; when it is low, it generates inefficiencies, frustration, and stress. When applied to the concept of technostress, the task–technology fit model provides a valuable interpretive framework. The model demonstrates that stress is not caused by technology per se but by the misalignment between what technology demands and what the user can realistically sustain. Such misalignment is frequently the consequence of inadequately managed organizational change, whereby innovations are introduced without sufficient consideration of work practices, cognitive load, and relational needs. It is imperative to recognize that effective stress prevention necessitates the establishment of a systemic equilibrium among three inherently interconnected components: the characteristics of the technology, the nature of the task, and the attributes of the individual. This triad – person, task, and technology – constitutes the foundation for truly sustainable change management. In this sense, the task–technology fit is not only a theory of technological efficiency but also a human-centred model of change management. Consequently, technostress can be mitigated not only through technical solutions but also, more importantly, through user-centred organizational design (Vendramin et al., 2021). The present authors propose an approach in which technological change is accompanied by processes of participation, training, and collective reflection. Empirical research has recently explored the practical implications of this perspective. For instance, Shi et al. (2023) demonstrate that technological stressors influence job and family satisfaction primarily through mechanisms of work–family conflict. The convergence of roles and the erosion of boundaries between work and personal time generate a chronic form of stress that has been demonstrated to reduce overall quality of life. Concurrently, Malaquias et al. (2025) discovered that computer self-efficacy – defined as an individual's confidence in their capacity to utilize technology – mitigates the adverse impact of technostress on performance and well-being, particularly in remote work environments. This finding indicates that training, empowerment, and organizational support are not only ancillary components but also fundamental dimensions of digital change management. Indeed, technological change is both a technical and a psychological process. The introduction of new platforms or systems invariably necessitates a renegotiation of meanings, roles, and competencies. It has been demonstrated that individuals do not inherently oppose change; rather, their resistance stems from the perceived loss of control and

coherence that it may engender. In the context of digital environments, this loss is exacerbated by the rapid pace and intricate nature of technological innovation. Consequently, recent literature has placed mounting emphasis on the necessity for well-being-oriented change management. Rademaker et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of the relationship between leadership and technostress. The review concluded that the quality of leadership exerts a significant influence on the perception of digital stress. Leadership styles that are oriented towards health, trust, and participation have been shown to mitigate the adverse effects of technological change, while leadership styles that are control-based or monitoring-focused have been demonstrated to exacerbate these effects. The relational dimension, therefore, becomes an integral component of digital change management. In a review published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Bondanini et al. (2020) demonstrate that technostress is a multifaceted phenomenon intertwining technological, organizational, and psychological dimensions, thus requiring a holistic assessment and response (Martinez, 2024). The authors hereby extend an invitation to scholars and practitioners to regard digitalization as a social and cultural transformation, one that demands multilevel prevention policies – ranging from digital education to the design of more inclusive work environments and the promotion of practices of disconnection and cognitive regeneration. From this standpoint, technostress is regarded not as an individual problem but rather as a collective symptom of systemic misalignment. This is defined as the discrepancy between the pace of innovation and the human capacity to absorb it in a healthy manner. Theories derived from the JD–R model and person–environment fit, when integrated with the task–technology fit, converge on a shared principle: That organizational well-being depends on maintaining balance between demands and resources, between complexity and support, and between the speed of change and the time required for learning. In the event of digital transformation progressing at an accelerated rate without the provision of adequate support, the result is not innovation but rather saturation. It is within this tension that the challenge of contemporary change management is revealed. It is imperative to acknowledge that technology is never neutral and that every innovation necessitates a corresponding investment in people, skills and organizational culture.

4.4 Managing Digital Change

In order to comprehend technostress in its entirety, it is imperative to acknowledge that technological change should not be regarded as a neutral occurrence; rather, it is a relational and cultural process. Technologies do not function in isolation; they are introduced, adopted, and interpreted within social contexts that are characterized by norms, roles, hierarchies,

and meanings. The experience of technological stress is contingent on the manner in which organizations manage the symbolic dimensions of change. As demonstrated by Rademaker et al. (2023), the relationship between leadership and technostress is bidirectional. On the one hand, leaders' behaviours have the capacity to reduce or amplify perceived pressure; on the other hand, leaders themselves are subject to digital stress, particularly when guiding transformation processes in uncertain and interconnected environments. Empathic, health-oriented leadership has been demonstrated to act as both a psychological and organizational resource, fostering trust and continuous learning. Conversely, leadership styles that are authoritarian or control-based serve to reinforce a culture of constant availability and performance anxiety, thereby heightening levels of techno-overload and techno-invasion. In many cases, the issue resides less in the technology itself and more in the organizational expectations that are associated with it. The proliferation of collaborative digital tools, for instance, has frequently been associated with the fallacy of infinite productivity. Synchronous communication platforms, including instant messaging and videoconferencing systems, facilitate constant connectivity, though at the expense of cognitive saturation. As Bondanini et al. (2020) have observed, the "dark side" of technology is manifesting not only in technical failures but also in the ways in which it is altering norms of behaviour and availability. The perpetual accessibility that is characteristic of contemporary social media platforms has been demonstrated to engender a form of internalized social control. Employees are compelled to respond, to be present, and to appear connected. This phenomenon, frequently referred to as digital presenteeism, signifies a novel domain within the broader context of technostress, posing a pivotal challenge to the realm of ethical and sustainable change management. Consequently, contemporary change management must extend beyond the operational phases of technological transition, encompassing the symbolic and cultural dimensions of work. The integration of novel technological systems necessitates a process of organizational sense-making, that is to say, the construction of shared meaning. According to Weick (1995), sense-making can be defined as the process by which individuals create meaning in situations that are ambiguous or complex. In the context of digitalization, the meaning of change is often ambiguous: Innovation is celebrated, yet its consequences may be perceived as a loss of control or humanity. Consequently, the function of change management is twofold: It is both pedagogical and narrative in nature. The responsibility of change management is to construct a coherent narrative that establishes a link between technological transformation and collective values and objectives. In this narrative, technology should be presented not as an imposition but as an ally; that is to say, an instrument that enhances human agency rather than constraining it. Recent research findings have indicated that perceptions of

fairness and transparency in change processes have a significant impact on responses to digital stress. Specifically, Shi et al. (2023) demonstrate that unclear roles, ambiguous communication rules, and the constant expansion of digital demands are key causes of strain-based conflict. This subtle form of conflict manifests as persistent emotional tension and a sense of "never being done," which undermines mental recovery and psychological detachment from work. When such conditions are chronic, they can lead to digital exhaustion, which, as Tarafdar et al. (2019) argue, may result in burn-out, cynicism, and deterioration of interpersonal relationships. However, these same authors introduce the concept of techno-eustress, emphasizing that not all technological stress is destructive. In conditions conducive to growth, creativity, and innovation, the subject has been observed to demonstrate a propensity for stimulation. Techno-eustress is defined as the constructive tension that drives learning and adaptation, transforming challenge into opportunity. This phenomenon occurs when technology is perceived as meaningful and controllable. The JD–R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) provides a comprehensive explanation of this phenomenon: The introduction of novel technologies invariably gives rise to new demands, yet concomitantly, they can also engender new resources, such as flexibility, access to information, and collaboration, provided that these are managed in an effective manner. The manner in which technologies are perceived as either resources or burdens is predominantly influenced by leadership and organizational culture. As demonstrated in the research by Nayaka et al. (2025), there is compelling evidence that perceived organizational support functions as a pivotal moderating factor in the association between technostress and well-being. In organizations where employees perceive genuine support, voice, and participation, the negative effects of technostress are significantly reduced. Conversely, in contexts characterized by authoritarianism or poor communication, even minor technological changes may be perceived as threats. The quality of the organizational climate therefore exerts an influence on not only individual well-being but also the effectiveness of transformation processes. Organizations that invest in dialogue, continuous training, and transparency build collective resilience, enabling them to face change with confidence rather than fear. Contributions to this field have been made through studies on health-oriented leadership (Klebe et al., 2023; Bregenzer & Jimenez, 2021). Conducted in digital and hybrid work environments, these studies demonstrate that health-conscious leadership – defined as the ability to recognize and manage signs of overload – enhances performance and reduces the risk of burn-out. The concept of a "healthy" leader is not predicated on the leader's propensity to demand more from their team; rather, it is characterized by the leader's ability to create conditions that facilitate enhanced teamwork and performance. In the context of DTs, this entails the management of work rhythms, the

promotion of restorative breaks, the establishment of boundaries for disconnection, and the modelling of balance. It is therefore proposed that leadership can be considered a form of boundary management, defined as the regulation of limits between connection and rest, and availability and autonomy. As demonstrated in the research by Bentley et al. (2016), which was conducted using a sample of remote workers, organizational support is the most significant factor determining the well-being of teleworkers. Intensive ICT use is not inherently detrimental; however, it becomes problematic when accompanied by factors such as isolation, ambiguity, and a lack of recognition. This lends further support to the notion that technostress is a systemic, rather than an individual, issue and that it pertains to the quality of the fit among person, task, and environment. Vendramin et al. (2021) emphasize this point precisely: The task–technology fit paradigm extends beyond a mere technical model, representing a fundamental shift in the relationship between technology and human needs, whereby the former is now expected to align with the latter. Organizations that achieve this alignment do not eliminate stress; rather, they transform it into a vital force for change. Consequently, well-being-oriented change management necessitates a comprehensive re-evaluation of organizational practices. Firstly, it is imperative to incorporate technostress risk assessment into the preliminary stages of innovation projects. It is imperative that each technological introduction be accompanied by an analysis of cognitive load, the competencies required, and the potential impacts on work rhythms. Secondly, training programmes must extend beyond technical instruction to include psychological and relational dimensions, helping workers to develop self-regulation, digital communication, and boundary management skills. Thirdly, it is imperative that technological change is supported by explicit policies that promote digital disconnection, equitable access to technology, and appreciation of generational diversity. It is evident that disparities in digital competencies and outlooks have the potential to evolve into valuable assets, provided they are managed with sensitivity. However, if these disparities are disregarded, they can serve as sources of tension. It is imperative to acknowledge that technology also functions as an identity factor. It is important to note that individuals do not merely utilize tools; through them, they construct their professional roles and self-conceptions. It is therefore the case that change management must support not only technical transitions but also identity transitions. The acquisition of new skills and the adoption of novel modes of interaction by employees can also result in the restructuring of their sense of self, competence, and value. In the absence of an acknowledgement of this process by the organization, adaptation becomes a source of discomfort. In contrast, when change is accompanied by recognition, dialogue, and opportunities for agency, digital transformation can become a source of personal and collective renewal (Smith, 2023).

4.5 Towards a "Digitally Sustainable" Organizational Change

The discourse on technostress and change management in contemporary society has converged towards a pivotal point: the necessity to establish digitally sustainable organizations. This expression, which is becoming increasingly prevalent in international scholarship, refers to the ability to maintain, over time, a balance among technological innovation, human well-being, and organizational cohesion. Digital sustainability is not an objective to be accomplished in a single instance; rather, it is a continuous process of learning, regulation, and realignment. The fundamental premise of this concept is that, in order for technology to genuinely empower individuals, it must align with the biological rhythms that define human existence – rather than the inverse. Tarafdar et al. (2019) posit that the same forces that engender stress can, if effectively managed, precipitate innovation. The distinction between techno-distress and techno-eustress is contingent on contextual factors, namely levels of control, role clarity, perceived support, and organizational culture. In environments that encourage autonomy and open dialogue, intensive technology use has been shown to stimulate learning and creativity. Conversely, within contexts characterized by fear, distrust, and pressure, these technologies can act as a source of alienation. In this sense, change management must be rethought as a practice of organizational care, in which digital transformation is not only an economic objective but also a process of human development. The quality of alignment among people, tasks, technologies, and the work environment has been demonstrated to influence not only productivity but also mental health and satisfaction (Appel-Meulenbroek & Danivska, 2021). The integration of technology within the spatial, social, and cultural context of work is paramount, rather than merely ensuring compatibility with a task. The concept of well-being and performance within the context of work is theorized as arising from the symbiotic relationship between physical and digital spaces and the concomitant work practices, values, and interpersonal relationships that they engender. From this perspective, technostress must be regarded not as a problem to be eliminated but as a signal of misalignment to be interpreted. The experience of feeling overwhelmed or frustrated in the presence of technology is frequently indicative of an organizational imbalance within an institution. Potential causes may include a lack of coherent redesign of tasks, excessive or redundant communication flows, or the absence of spaces dedicated to reflection and disconnection. The process of effective change management entails the interpretation of such signals and their subsequent transformation into opportunities for adjustment. Technology can be conceptualized as a lens through which pre-existing organizational contradictions – such as centralization, role ambiguity, and deficits of trust – are rendered more

pronounced. Consequently, effective management of digital change necessitates the addressing of these structural fragilities (Tarafdar et al., 2019). Achieving digital sustainability is contingent upon the cultivation of a culture of trust, which is identified as a key element in this process. DTs, by their very nature, serve to both augment transparency and control. The utilization of monitoring systems, collaboration platforms, and activity-tracking software holds considerable potential; however, it is imperative to exercise ethical sensitivity in their application to avoid the potential for surveillance. As demonstrated by Rademaker et al. (2023), an excessive degree of technological control has been found to be a contributing factor to feelings of anxiety and a reduction in autonomy, both of which have been directly correlated with the development of technostress. Conversely, organizations that cultivate cultures founded on trust and collective responsibility are better positioned to leverage technology as a catalyst for empowerment. This evolution in the concept of leadership is characterized by a shift from a model of command to one of relationship building. Transformational leadership, in this view, is defined as the integration of technological competence with EI. The objective is not only to facilitate technical change but also to establish a psychologically safe environment in which individuals can engage in experimentation, make mistakes, and acquire knowledge without fear. In a comparative analysis across several sectors, Klebe et al. (2023) demonstrate that health-promoting leadership practices significantly reduce levels of technostress, especially within virtual teams. The leader who promotes digital well-being establishes clear communication rules, encourages periods of rest and recuperation, and acknowledges the human limits of constant connectivity. In this sense, leadership can be regarded as the primary infrastructure of well-being, insofar as it is through the establishment of relationships of trust that collective resilience to change can be fostered. In addition to this transformative leadership perspective, it is imperative to consider organizational resilience. As discussed by Boin and Eeten (2013) and more recently by Mallak (2019), organizational resilience refers to a system's capacity to absorb shocks and reorganize while maintaining its identity. When applied to the digital context, this means being able to manage technological discontinuity without losing coherence and meaning. Resilience is not synonymous with resistance to change; rather, it is defined as adaptive flexibility, that is to say, the capacity to transform stress into learning and to respond to misalignment with creativity rather than closure. As demonstrated by Bondanini et al. (2020), resilient organizations are those that acknowledge the emotional dimension of change and integrate it into decision-making processes. Stress is not something that is denied; rather, it is recognized as being part of the evolutionary journey. Conventional change management paradigms have historically prioritized procedural aspects, utilizing tools and temporal management as key mechanisms to ensure efficiency. However, contemporary

challenges in this domain are increasingly demanding a recalibration of this balance, emphasizing the need for a judicious equilibrium between expediency and discernment. Digitalization imposes an accelerated rhythm, yet the human brain and social relationships require slower adaptation times. In the absence of mindful governance, this mismatch in tempo can result in chronic fatigue. Consequently, it is imperative for organizations to integrate concepts such as the digital pause, the right to disconnect, and the concept of reflective space into their operational lexicon. It is important to note that these elements should not be interpreted as indications of inefficiency; rather, they are fundamental conditions for sustainability. Several European countries have already recognized the right to disconnect as a fundamental safeguard. However, the effectiveness of this right depends more on organizational culture than on legal enforcement. For organizations, it is imperative that change is conceptualized as a continuous design process, framed through a holistic perspective – designing systems, roles, and environments that evolve in tandem with the needs and developments of the people to whom they are intended. The integration of task–technology fit with the concept of employee–environment fit represents a significant step forward in this field. The former focuses on the alignment between tools and tasks, while the latter extends attention to the overall congruence between the individual and their environment. Research by Appel-Meulenbroek and colleagues demonstrates that when the work environment, comprehensively understood as encompassing both physical and digital aspects, aligns with individual preferences, competencies, and requirements, performance is enhanced and stress is reduced. It is important to note that individuals' perceptions of technology are influenced by personal characteristics such as tolerance for ambiguity, learning orientation, and digital self-efficacy (Ayyagari et al., 2011). Consequently, effective change management must be tailored to the individual, as individuals experience transformation in diverse ways, and support strategies must account for these differences. Standardized training or impersonal communication risks widening the gap between innovation and lived experience. Conversely, personalization has been demonstrated to enhance recognition and mitigate anxiety associated with change. Finally, sustainable digital transformation also requires a renewed balance between efficiency and humanity. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the ethics of technological work in the context of the increasing adoption of automation and AI. The increasing utilization of algorithmic decision-making, performance-monitoring systems, and predictive platforms gives rise to novel concerns regarding transparency, fairness, and trust. The risk of such a pursuit is the erosion of responsibility and autonomy. However, as Tarafdar et al. (2019) observe, technology does not unilaterally determine organizational outcomes; rather, it is the policies, norms, and values of the organization that define its effects. Organizations that adopt the principles of

responsible technology – grounded in fairness, participation, and respect for human dignity – experience a reduction in technostress and concomitant enhancement of the quality of work. In conclusion, it is evident that the paradigm of change management must transcend its conventional operational confines. It is imperative that this evolves into a philosophy of governing complexity, capable of balancing innovation with care. The management of technostress is not the responsibility of a single department but rather a collective endeavour involving leaders, designers, trainers, and policymakers. In order to thrive in the future, organizations must develop the capacity to design for alignment, thereby ensuring that the integration of new technologies with human capabilities, values, and limits is seamless. The task–technology fit thus becomes a metaphor for sustainability: It is not sufficient for technology to function – it must function well for people. The crux of this issue is that such a harmony is the key to achieving lasting change. It is not the organizations that move with the most rapidity that will thrive but rather those that adapt with sagacity, safeguarding the vital energy of their people. The future of digital work is contingent upon the capacity to integrate technology with the human element, thereby fostering a technologically informed awareness among individuals.

4.6 Conclusion

Managing digital transformation is a complex process that cannot be understood and managed from a purely technical perspective. Technologies permeate and involve all parts of the organization, shaping work rhythms, meanings, and relationships, while generating opportunities for innovation and new forms of psychological pressure. In this scenario, the phenomenon of technostress is a crucial indicator that helps to understand whether and to what extent the digital transformation process has produced an alignment among people, tasks, technologies, and organizational culture. The various studies analysed converge on one essential point: It is not technology itself that produces stress but rather the way in which it is introduced, interpreted, and regulated within work contexts. This implies that contemporary change management must take into account the pervasiveness of technology and the possible negative effects produced by its intense use. Therefore, the focus on adopting a continuous, participatory, and well-being-oriented approach in the workplace seems to be a constant concern for managers. Theoretical models such as JD–R, person–environment fit, and task–technology fit offer an integrated framework for understanding how the demands generated by digitalization can be balanced by adequate resources, such as training, health-oriented leadership, participation, psychological support, and disconnection policies. Without such a balance, technological acceleration risks translating into cognitive overload, loss of control, and compromised

individual and collective well-being. The challenge for today's organizations is therefore to design changes that are not only efficient but also understandable, fair, and sustainable. This requires recognizing the cultural dimension of DT, building shared narratives that guide its meaning, and promoting leadership that integrates technical expertise and empathy. Managing technostress thus becomes a strategic component of organizational sustainability: a process of care that transforms the pressure of complexity into an opportunity for learning, innovation, and growth. Ultimately, the future of digital work will depend on the ability of organizations to harmonize innovation and humanity. It will not be the companies that adopt new technologies most quickly that will prosper but those that are able to make them work effectively for people. Digitalization can thus become not only a driver of efficiency but also a catalyst for well-being, participation, and development, laying the foundations for truly sustainable change.

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5 Managing Conflict in the Digital and Hybrid Organization

Rosario Marrapodi

5.1 Introduction

Conflict in organizations has always constituted an inevitable component of labour relations; however, the diffusion of DTs and virtual and hybrid work models has profoundly altered its forms, causes, and effects. Contemporary organizations are characterized by the use of technological tools to mediate communication, the prevalence of geographically distributed teams, and the erosion of boundaries between work time and personal time. Within this scenario, conflict dynamics do not disappear but rather transform, often becoming more subtle, pervasive, and difficult to manage (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). One of the most evident changes pertains to communication, which has historically represented the privileged terrain upon which conflicts emerge and are sustained. In the context of virtual teams, the absence of non-verbal cues can impede the ability to accurately decipher intentions and emotions, thereby introducing a degree of complexity to interpersonal interactions. The interpretation of non-verbal communication in professional contexts, such as email correspondence, brief responses during informal conversations, or prolonged silence during videoconferences, can be a subject of interest. It is important to note that signals of hostility or disinterest can be interpreted even when they were not intended to convey such sentiments. The absence of face-to-face contact deprives interactions of the nuances that traditionally helped prevent or defuse relational conflicts, thereby increasing the likelihood that minor misunderstandings will escalate into persistent tensions (Wakefield et al., 2008; Ayoko & Konrad, 2012). Research has demonstrated that relational conflicts are particularly frequent in distributed teams. This is due to physical distance and technological mediation weakening mutual trust and reducing the possibility of resorting to informal clarification mechanisms. In traditional contexts, conflict could be mitigated by a direct conversation over coffee or an exchange of remarks in the hallways. Conversely, in digital organizations, opportunities for spontaneous interaction are minimized,

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thereby facilitating the accumulation of tensions. Trust, which represents a crucial resource for preventing conflicts or transforming them into constructive opportunities, becomes more fragile and more difficult to reconstruct once compromised (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). In addition to relational conflicts, task conflicts also exhibit distinctive characteristics within the digital context. The increasing prevalence of communication and project management platforms has led to a situation where workers are subjected to a continuous and fragmented flow of information. The receipt of notifications from a variety of sources, including email, corporate chats, project management software, and collaboration applications, can result in an augmentation of tasks and an accumulation of demands. This phenomenon frequently gives rise to divergences in priorities. In a team distributed across multiple time zones, for instance, it may occur that subgroups of workers develop divergent priorities based on the flow of information received at different times, fuelling friction over what should be completed first and who should assume responsibility for activities (Molino et al., 2020). The issue of role ambiguity is closely intertwined with these dynamics. DTs have been shown to facilitate cross-functional collaboration, yet they have also been observed to render the boundaries of individual responsibilities less clear. In circumstances where multiple individuals are permitted to intervene on the same documents or processes without the presence of precise guidelines, there is a heightened risk of tasks being duplicated and of workers lacking clarity regarding the decision maker or the outcome. This ambiguity has been shown to engender frustration and to serve as a direct source of interpersonal conflict, manifesting in reciprocal accusations, perceptions of inefficiency, and tensions between departments (Malaquias et al., 2025). This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in the public sector and large bureaucratic organizations. In the digital age, process conflicts are of particular relevance, and these intensify in circumstances where co-ordination mechanisms are unclear or digital systems are not perfectly integrated. In the event of data entry being performed manually across multiple non-interconnected platforms, the probability of errors increases, as does the tendency to attribute blame to colleagues or other departments. Cultural and linguistic differences, an inherent aspect of global teams, also intertwine with process conflicts. Variations in the interpretation of concepts such as punctuality, the formality of communications, and the management of response times can engender a fertile ground for misunderstandings and tensions, particularly in the absence of shared guidelines (Schulze et al., 2015). Beyond these collective dimensions, intrapersonal conflicts must not be overlooked, which manifest in an accentuated manner in hybrid and remote contexts. The pervasive expectation of constant connectivity engenders a challenging environment in which to delineate boundaries between professional and personal domains. Employees may experience a dilemma between the

obligation to promptly address an evening message and the aspiration to prioritize familial commitments, leading to feelings of frustration, guilt, and internal tension. This tension can, over time, also have a negative impact on organizational relationships (Shi et al., 2023). This dynamic illustrates how conflict not only is exhausted in visible interactions between individuals and groups but also affects the individual psychological dimension, with cascading effects on collaboration and overall climate. The combination of physical presence and remote activity, typified by hybrid work models, serves to exacerbate these tensions. Those working on-site may perceive themselves as having greater visibility and therefore enhanced career opportunities, while remote colleagues may feel excluded from decision-making processes or less recognized for their contributions. This phenomenon, termed the "asymmetry of visibility," has emerged as a significant source of conflict in hybrid contexts. It has been observed to fuel perceptions of injustice and to erode internal cohesion (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Concurrently, those engaged in remote work face the challenge of balancing professional obligations and domestic responsibilities. This often leads to the management of online meetings in shared family spaces, resulting in conflicts that extend beyond organizational and personal boundaries. In summary, organizational conflict in the digital and hybrid era cannot be understood as a simple reiteration of classic categories but rather as their transformation within a context in which virtuality, hyperconnectivity, and role fluidity radically alter the conditions of collaboration. The reduction of social cues, the fragmentation of communication, the ambiguity of responsibilities, and the invasion of personal boundaries are now structural factors that render conflict more frequent, less visible, and more complex to manage. Conflict can also be regarded as a resource when understood as an opportunity for collective learning and innovation. However, effective leadership and organizational practices are required to manage its complexity (Tjosvold, 2008; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008).

5.2 Organizational Conflict in the Digital Age

In the contemporary digital era, organizational conflict can no longer be comprehended through the lens of traditional categories of interpersonal disagreement or divergence between roles and objectives. Instead, it is indicative of a phenomenon that is inextricably linked to technological transformation and the progressive virtualization of work relationships. DTs, encompassing communication platforms, work management systems, and online collaborative environments, are not merely neutral tools. Instead, they function as authentic social mediators that facilitate the restructuring of interaction processes, the redefinition of power hierarchies, and the introduction of novel forms of visibility and invisibility (Jarvenpaa & Leidner,

1999; Tarafdar & Gordon, 2007). In such environments, conflict tends to become less obvious but more prevalent. The reduction of non-verbal signals, the absence of physical proximity, and fragmented, asynchronous communication render the capture of early tension signals more complex. This fosters the emergence of cognitive and emotional misalignments. If these are not recognized, they can degenerate into veritable states of collective stress (Schweitzer & Duxbury, 2010; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). The digitalization of work has furthermore altered the nature of conflict sources. The advent of collaborative platforms and continuous monitoring systems has given rise to new areas of ambiguity. The presence of role overlap, hyperconnectivity, and constant availability has resulted in the permeation of boundaries between professional and personal domains, giving rise to frictions between the requirements of organizational efficiency and individual recovery needs (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Kumar, 2024). In this sense, role conflict and work–family conflict assume unprecedented forms, as technological mediation amplifies the invasion of work into private spaces and produces a sense of digital invasiveness that compromises the psychological and relational equilibrium of workers (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008; Harris et al., 2013). Conflicts that were previously contained within the organization now have a tendency to extend beyond its boundaries, thereby transforming into a diffuse tension that pervades the entire life sphere of the subject. Concurrently, hybrid configurations – where physical presence is succeeded by virtual presence – introduce novel asymmetries in the perception of equity, recognition, and participation. The concept of distance is not confined to physical separation but rather encompasses symbolic dimensions. In the context of the workplace, those who are more "visible" tend to enjoy a greater degree of legitimacy, while those who predominantly operate in a remote capacity risk becoming marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes (Naqshbandi et al., 2023; Dogru, 2023). These disparities in visibility give rise to latent conflicts between organizational groups and subgroups, giving rise to sentiments of injustice and eroding the sense of collective belonging. This results in the emergence of a novel form of perceptual conflict, whereby the differential access to information and relational networks replaces traditional conflicts of interest or status. Concurrently, the escalating intricacy of technology engenders an augmentation in cognitive conflict, associated with the complexity of interpreting, integrating, and employing coherently the informational flows generated by digital systems. Information overload, source fragmentation, and the pressure for instantaneous reactivity undermine the capacity to elaborate shared meanings, favouring the emergence of errors, misunderstandings, and operational overlaps (Tarafdar et al., 2007; Brod, 1984). In this scenario, the distinction between constructive and destructive conflict becomes increasingly tenuous: The very technological innovation that can stimulate creative confrontation

can also degenerate into disorientation and antagonism if not accompanied by adequate sense-making processes and mediation-capable leadership. The management of organizational conflict in the digital age thus necessitates a comprehensive re-evaluation of managerial and relational practices. Classic conflict resolution models, including Blake and Mouton's managerial grid (1964), Thomas and Kilmann's Conflict Mode Instrument (1978), and Rahim's Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (1983), have retained their analytical value. However, these models require reinterpretation in light of digital dynamics. In contemporary organizational settings, conflict can no longer be regarded as a discrete event to be resolved; rather, it should be conceptualized as a continuous process to be regulated. This paradigm shift is precipitated by the fluid nature of organizational boundaries and the increasing prevalence of technological environments that condition communication, power, and professional identity. Digital leadership, otherwise known as e-leadership, can therefore be regarded as a pivotal mechanism for the mitigation and transformation of conflict. The concept under discussion here is that of the capacity to establish emotional proximity despite physical separation, to cultivate trust through mediated channels, and to encourage inclusion and participation in contexts characterized by fragmentation and informational asymmetry (Avolio et al., 2000; Uhl-Bien, 2006). The digital leader's role encompasses not only the management of technology but also the orchestration of relationships, scheduling, and linguistic considerations. By transforming conflict into opportunities for organizational learning, the digital leader contributes to the enhancement of the organization's overall effectiveness.

5.3 Conflicts in Virtual and Hybrid Teams

In contemporary organizations, virtual and hybrid teams have become an integral structural element. The acceleration of this process has been compounded by the digital transformation and the repercussions of the pandemic, which have led to the widespread adoption of remote work practices, often on a permanent basis. These configurations offer numerous advantages, including the ability to assemble distributed competencies across different geographic contexts, the reduction of travel costs, and an increase in flexibility. However, research has demonstrated that such benefits are accompanied by new sources of conflict, linked primarily to physical distance, technological mediation of communication, and cultural diversity (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). One of the principal challenges is the management of distance, which is not only spatial or temporal but also cognitive and social. In teams that collaborate remotely, the absence of daily face-to-face interactions can reduce opportunities for the establishment of personal bonds and the development of trust. In the absence of these elements, the likelihood of conflict

escalating and the duration of such conflicts are increased. In circumstances where team members are unable to interact informally, as is often the case in office environments, even minor misunderstandings have the potential to escalate into significant tensions (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). To illustrate this point, consider the following example: A comment made on a collaborative platform may be interpreted in different ways by two colleagues, resulting in misunderstandings that, in the absence of immediate clarification, become entrenched and create persistent friction. Technology-mediated communication constitutes a further critical factor. Despite the evident advantages of such digital tools as Zoom, Teams, and Slack in terms of facilitating rapid co-ordination of complex activities, it has been demonstrated that they are unable to reproduce the richness of face-to-face communication. The reduction of non-verbal and paralinguistic signals has been shown to increase the probability of erroneous interpretations and to render the distinction between task conflicts and relational conflicts more difficult. Constructive criticism expressed in writing may be perceived as a personal attack, while a delayed response may be interpreted as disinterest. The extant literature has highlighted the particular vulnerability of virtual teams to such forms of misunderstanding, which have been shown to result in an escalation in the frequency of relational conflicts (see Ayoko & Konrad, 2012; Wakefield et al., 2008).

The sources of conflict in virtual teams can be examined through four key dimensions of virtuality:

Spatial Dispersion. The physical separation of team members complicates direct supervision and real-time communication, increasing ambiguity surrounding tasks, roles, and responsibilities (Shin, 2005). Moreover, the absence of face-to-face interactions diminishes opportunities to build trust and cohesion within the team (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999).

Temporal Dispersion. Differences in time zones hinder co-ordination and the clarification of expectations, often resulting in frustration and delays. As Cramton (2001) notes, members of virtual teams may struggle to receive timely feedback, which can lead to misunderstandings regarding shared goals or the progress required to achieve them.

Cultural Dispersion. As highlighted by Hofstede (2011), cultural differences shape values, communication styles, and work practices. In virtual teams – where interaction is mediated and lacks contextual richness – these differences can intensify conflict, especially when members hold contrasting cultural orientations, such as individualistic versus collectivistic values (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005).

Organizational Dispersion. In multi-organizational or cross-organizational teams, members may experience isolation due to the temporary and fluid nature of their affiliation (Fiol & O'Connor, 2005). This sense of

detachment weakens group cohesion and may create identity-related challenges, ultimately reducing the team's capacity to collaborate effectively (Shin, 2005).

In hybrid teams, conflict assumes even more complex forms, as the asymmetry of visibility is added. Those who are office-based are often assumed to have superior access to information and greater opportunities for interaction with superiors. By contrast, remote colleagues risk feeling excluded from decision-making processes and less recognized for their contributions. This discrepancy has been shown to engender perceptions of injustice and can translate into latent conflicts between "insiders" and "outsiders" (Smith & Hill, 2019). In a public organization, for instance, officials present on-site can more easily influence operational decisions, while those working remotely can feel marginalized, developing resentment and tensions with colleagues (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Another element that has been identified as a contributing factor to the escalation of conflicts in virtual and hybrid teams is cultural and linguistic diversity. DTs have facilitated the establishment of global work groups, yet this has concomitantly given rise to disparities in communication styles, expectations, and values. Discrepancies in the modality of feedback provision, the degree of linguistic formality employed, and the conceptualization of time can readily give rise to misunderstandings. A team comprising individuals from cultures that value direct communication and others that prefer a more indirect approach risks entering into conflict over the very mode of expression, especially when interactions occur exclusively in digital form (Klitmoller & Lauring, 2013). Research has furthermore highlighted how process conflicts are particularly common in virtual teams, where the lack of clear rules on activity management and platform usage generates friction. In the absence of established routines, members may perceive an obligation to assume an unduly onerous responsibility, while others appear less engaged. In a collaborative research project, for example, if the methods for uploading data and updating documents are not precisely defined, it is likely that tensions will arise regarding who should perform certain activities, with reciprocal accusations of negligence or disorganization (Schulze et al., 2015). Finally, the emotional dimension of conflict in virtual and hybrid teams must not be under-estimated. The phenomenon of negative emotions is exacerbated by factors such as social isolation, the diminution of social support networks, and the challenges associated with the sharing of informal experiences. These factors contribute to a reduction in the number of opportunities for the collective processing of negative emotions. Recent studies have demonstrated that in virtual contexts, conflicts tend to be more intense and enduring precisely because the human contact that often enables tensions to be moderated and bonds to be reinforced is lacking. In the absence of authentic confrontation

moments, the risk is that conflict compromises relationships, group cohesion, and, consequently, overall performance (Ayoko & Konrad, 2012). In conclusion, virtual and hybrid teams are a context particularly exposed to conflict. Distance, technological mediation, cultural diversity, and visibility asymmetries have been shown to engender new forms of tension that intertwine with classic typologies of organizational conflict, thereby redefining their intensity and modes of manifestation. It is imperative to comprehend these dynamics to formulate efficacious management practices that transcend mere conflict mitigation and instead foster the conversion of adversity into prospects for learning and innovation.

5.4 Leadership and Conflict Management Practices

5.4.1 From Traditional Leadership to E-Leadership

Digital transformations have profoundly redefined the nature of leadership and, concomitantly, the modalities of conflict management in organizations. In traditional organizational models, leadership was founded on the principle of proximity: The leader exercised their influence through physical presence, direct communication, and the formal authority conferred by their role. Control, supervision, and hierarchy were the principal instruments of cohesion and regulation of relationships. The advent of DTs has resulted in the fracturing of this equilibrium. In contemporary organizational settings, the paradigm shift from vertical to networked ecosystems has rendered traditional models of guidance based on immediate visibility obsolete. The ubiquity of physical distance, the simultaneity of connections, and the multiplicity of information channels in networked ecosystems have superseded the conventional models of guidance (Avolio et al., 2000; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). Digital leadership, otherwise referred to as e-leadership, has emerged as a response to this new complexity. The present study demonstrates that the application of command logics in virtual environments is not a simple transposition; rather, it necessitates a profound reconfiguration of the relationship between leadership and group. Rather than being an impediment, physical distance becomes a structural condition that must be managed through intentional communication, trust, and clarity. In the contemporary digital era, effective leadership does not entail the exercise of direct control; rather, it is characterized by the construction of symbolic proximity, that is to say, the establishment of a shared perception of presence and coherence, even in the absence of physical contact (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The leadership process therefore transitions from the domain of surveillance to that of relationship, where power is not located in authority but rather in the capacity to generate meaning, trust, and orientation. In the context of digital communication, the transmission of information is not merely a means to an

end; rather, it constitutes an act that is in itself significant. This constitutes a definition of roles, identity, and belonging. It is therefore incumbent upon leaders operating in digital environments to develop a language capable of transmitting coherence and recognition, clarifying expectations, and managing the plurality of interpretations that technological platforms introduce (Avolio et al., 2000). In this sense, digital leadership is no longer a function concentrated in a single figure but a distributed process that traverses the entire organizational system. Trust becomes the fundamental adhesive in contexts where direct verification is impossible and interactions are often asynchronous. The formation of such a relationship is a gradual process, founded upon consistent behaviours, communicative transparency, and mutual respect. In such circumstances, leadership becomes relational and reflexive in nature, necessitating constant vigilance with regard to subtle indications of organizational climate, the quality of interactions, and perceptions of equity. Moreover, e-leadership entails a distinct relationship with technology. The leader is not only a user but also a symbolic regulator of digital interfaces: The selection of channels, the frequency of communications, the tone of messages, and the management of visibility are actions that implicitly define power dynamics and recognition. Technology thus becomes an integral part of the leadership process, an extension of language and authority that shapes the relational experience of the group (Trist & Bamforth, 1951; Pasmore, 1988). The true challenge of contemporary leadership consists of creating a balance between presence and autonomy. A leader who is too distant generates disorientation, but one who is excessively invasive compromises trust. The effectiveness of such interventions is derived from their ability to balance communication, support, and control, thereby fostering a climate of psychological safety and shared accountability.

5.4.2 Sociotechnical Competencies and Emotional Intelligence in Digital Mediation

The integration of sociotechnical skills and EI is fundamental to effective leadership in digital contexts. This combination enables the management not only of the operational complexities introduced by technologies but also of the relational tensions and conflicts that emerge from distance and electronic mediation. The concept of sociotechnical skills encompasses the ability to comprehend and regulate the interdependence between technology and human behaviour. It is implied that every technological system incorporates a vision of work, relationships, and power and that the modalities of digital tool usage influence the quality of co-ordination and group well-being (Eason, 2001). The sociotechnical approach emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between the technical and social dimensions of work, with technology serving to facilitate cooperation rather

than surveillance or control (Trist & Bamforth, 1951; Pasmore, 1988). Concurrently, emotional competence is identified as a pivotal component of digital leadership. This concept extends beyond the mere management of conflicts to encompass the ability to discern and interpret the emotions that are inherent in mediated communication. The phenomenon of reduced physical proximity and the concomitant diminution of non-verbal signals can impede the ability to discern the affective nuances that frequently precede or accompany contrasts. Emotional sensitivity is therefore considered a strategic competency for identifying latent tensions and preventing relationship deterioration (Goleman, 1995, 2002). It is imperative for leaders operating within digital environments to possess the capacity to decipher the unspoken elements inherent in written messages, protracted periods of silence, delayed responses, or an abrupt tone. These elements, when discerned, can serve as crucial indicators of discomfort or disagreement. The function of these mechanisms is not authoritarian but regulatory; that is to say, they serve to maintain a balance between communicative efficiency and respect for emotions. This necessitates the possession of empathy, the capacity to listen, and self-control. In addition, it requires mastery of the technological context and the cognitive dynamics engendered by constant platform usage. Another crucial competency is the management of digital equity. In virtual or hybrid teams, technology has the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities of visibility and access to information. It is incumbent upon the leader to ensure equitable conditions for participation by means of regulating the distribution of communicative opportunities and monitoring the risks of exclusion. Perceived justice is an essential element for preventing conflicts and fostering cohesion (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Digital equity concerns not only the use of tools but also the quality of listening and the symbolic recognition of individual contributions. Emotionally intelligent leadership is characterized by the capacity for containment. In situations involving tension or disagreement, impulsive responses or rigidity can serve to exacerbate conflict. The leader must instead cultivate an environment of psychological safety, thereby fostering an atmosphere wherein confrontation can occur without the looming spectre of judgement. This approach does not entail the avoidance of conflict but rather the management and constructive resolution of it. The capacity of leadership to regulate collective emotions, foster calm, and orient reflection has been identified as a critical factor in organizational well-being and the relational sustainability of groups (Goleman, 2002). In conclusion, it is evident that digital leadership cannot be considered a mere technical or managerial competency; rather, it is a form of situated intelligence that integrates human sensitivity, technological awareness, and ethical capacity. It acknowledges that the quality of work is contingent not only on process efficiency but also on the emotional and symbolic health of the relationships that underpin them.

5.5 Technostress and Organizational Conflict

5.5.1 Technostress as a Complex Organizational Phenomenon

Over the past two decades, technostress has shifted from being perceived as an individual side effect of technology use to a systemic phenomenon that permeates organizational life. The classic definition by Brod (1984), which described it as "a modern disease caused by the inability to cope with new computer technologies," now proves reductive. More recent research interprets it as a multidimensional condition, generated by the interaction among individuals, technological tools, organizational structures, and digital work culture (Tarafdar et al., 2007; Ayyagari et al., 2011; Kumar, 2024). From this perspective, technostress is not an isolated problem but a manifestation of adaptive tension that arises when the speed of technological innovation exceeds human and organizational capacity to absorb it. Digital acceleration, the constant reconfiguration of tools, and hyperconnectivity have altered the rhythms of cooperation, redefining the perception of time, space, and competence. DTs, while enhancing productivity and communication, impose continuous attention, permanent monitoring, and an availability that fragments the work experience (Pflügner et al., 2021). Technostress manifests through a range of technological stressors, including techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-complexity, techno-insecurity, and techno-uncertainty (Tarafdar et al., 2007; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). These dimensions do not operate independently but intertwine in configurations that profoundly modify the quality of professional relationships. They generate anxiety, loss of control, feelings of inefficacy, reduced social support, and psychological disconnection, which in turn constitute fertile ground for the emergence of intra- and interpersonal conflicts. Constant hyperconnectivity has, in fact, introduced a new form of organizational vulnerability, wherein the worker no longer confronts merely tangible workloads but the invisible pressure of information and the responsibility to remain constantly updated. This produces a paradoxical effect: Technologies, created to facilitate co-ordination and reduce distance, can become generators of isolation, fragmentation, and social tension.

5.5.2 The Dimensions of Technostress and Their Conflictual Repercussions

In order to comprehend the relationship between technostress and organizational conflict, it is necessary to undertake a thorough analysis of the nature of the five techno-stressors in question, alongside the psychological and relational mechanisms that accompany them. The term "techno-overload" is employed to denote the state in which technological advancements result

in an augmentation of both quantitative and qualitative demands in the workplace. Digital platforms have the capacity to expand the number of messages, meetings, documents, and decisions to be managed, thereby shortening temporal cycles and reducing margins for reflection. This phenomenon can result in a state of cognitive dissonance, characterized by the struggle to discern between tasks of urgency and those of significance. This phenomenon gives rise to two distinct tensions: horizontal tensions arising from a lack of co-ordination and vertical tensions stemming from perceptions of unrealistic expectations (Ayyagari et al., 2011). Conversely, the concept of "techno-invasion" denotes the encroachment of technological advancements into the private domain. The ongoing accessibility and perpetual availability of ICTs have been demonstrated to eradicate the conventional boundaries between professional and personal domains, thereby engendering forms of work–family discord and a perpetual sense of intrusiveness (Harris et al., 2013). Technology, in this case, becomes a vector of symbolic pressure: through notifications, emails, and meetings outside working hours, it implicitly communicates that total availability is synonymous with dedication and professional value. The resultant phenomenon can be described as an identity tension, whereby the worker experiences difficulty in maintaining separate roles. The manifestation of techno-complexity occurs when the technical intricacy of tools surpasses the users' perceived competencies. It is evident that each update, platform, or new protocol necessitates a cognitive and training investment that does not invariably receive the requisite support. This phenomenon gives rise to intergenerational and status conflicts, as those who demonstrate a higher level of proficiency in technologies tend to accrue greater legitimacy, while those encountering difficulties in adapting to these technologies may experience feelings of frustration or marginalization (Tarafdar & Gordon, 2007). The concept of techno-insecurity is predicated on the fear of being replaced, downgraded, or marginalized due to digitalization. The advent of process automation and the integration of AI within various facets of industry have given rise to concerns regarding the potential consequences on the future relevance of specific skill sets and the consequent implications for occupational stability. This sentiment of insecurity has the potential to evolve into a state of competitive conflict, characterized by defensive behaviours and a paucity of information sharing (Pflügner et al., 2021). Finally, techno-uncertainty arises from the continuous evolution of tools and the impossibility of stabilizing operational routines. The constant drive for innovation has resulted in a perpetual state of learning, where acquired knowledge rapidly becomes outdated. The prevailing uncertainty engenders a climate of cognitive and relational precarity, resulting in an escalation of misunderstandings and interpretive conflicts (Kumar, 2024). These stressors accumulate alongside organizational factors such as role ambiguity, internal competition, and lack of recognition, amplifying

perceptions of injustice and lack of support. Consequently, technostress can be regarded not only as an individual psychological condition but also as a systemic catalyst of organizational conflict.

5.5.3 Technostress as a Generator of New Forms of Conflict

The introduction of technologies has had a profound impact on the nature of organizational conflict. In addition to the well-documented tensions among task, relationship, and role, hybrid conflicts are now emerging in which the technological component is intertwined with the symbolic dimension. Digital interfaces, monitoring systems, and performance traceability mechanisms have been shown to alter the perception of trust and autonomy, thereby introducing invisible forms of control that modify the relationship between worker and organization (Tarafdar et al., 2007; Auriemma et al., 2024). Conflict no longer manifests solely as explicit confrontation but rather as passive, silent resistance, which translates into disengagement behaviours, reduced collaboration, and operational isolation. Moreover, the culture of "real-time work" promoted by digital platforms fosters a logic of urgency that collides with the timescales of reflection and deliberation. This accelerated rhythm gives rise to a daily series of micro-conflicts, manifesting in the form of overlapping meetings, contradictory emails, and conflicting priorities. Such tensions, although ostensibly inconsequential, have the insidious effect of gradually eroding team cohesion and undermining mutual trust. A further effect of this is the fragmentation of the sense of community. The presence of multiple digital tools generates partial and discontinuous interaction spaces, wherein people communicate without truly meeting. This renders the recognition of the other in their entirety more difficult, reducing the capacity for empathy and, consequently, the propensity for cooperation. Conflicts induced by technostress also assume a cognitive dimension. Information overload and the disruption of attention flows can impede the maintenance of a strategic vision for activities. This phenomenon has been shown to result in impulsive decisions, co-ordination difficulties, and collective frustration. The transition of technology from a source of support to a source of distraction has been demonstrated to result in the emergence of conflict. This shift in conflict dynamics is characterized by a transition from divergences in objectives to divergences in perception. Specifically, subjects' interpretation of the same information becomes divergent, leading to the generation of structural misunderstandings.

5.5.4 Leadership, Adaptation, and Governance of Technostress

The management of technostress-induced conflict necessitates an examination of its organizational roots, as opposed to a mere focus on its individual

symptoms. The most efficacious strategies do not consist in limiting technology use but in governing it socially, thus restoring meaning and proportion. Recent research emphasizes the pivotal function of digital leadership in establishing psychologically safe and cognitively sustainable environments (Sacavém et al., 2025). In this context, leadership is said to assume a regulatory function: It balances performance requirements with well-being needs, establishes clear boundaries for availability, and promotes disconnection moments as tools for balance rather than resistance. A leader who is cognizant of technology's potential for conflict does not merely utilize platforms for the purpose of co-ordination; rather, they employ them to achieve harmonization. This entails the synchronization of timing, the selection of appropriate channels, the streamlining of communication flows, and the modulation of expectations. Concurrently, the management of technostress necessitates the implementation of a digital education initiative. This initiative should encompass not only technical learning but also the cultivation of competencies in informational self-control, digital time management, and ethical use of connectivity. Organizations that have been successful in the reduction of technological conflicts are those that have developed integrated digital well-being policies based on transparency, regulated autonomy, and a culture of trust. The utilization of tools such as "quiet policies," asynchronous planning methodologies, and participatory collaborative platforms illustrates that technology has the potential to serve as a catalyst for efficiency enhancement and a mechanism for achieving equilibrium. Technostress is a significant contributing factor to organizational conflict in the present day. This phenomenon must not be considered marginal but rather as an indicator of the profound organizational transformation that is occurring in the transition to the digital economy. The efficacy of conventional conflict management techniques is questionable, as they presuppose stable relationships, linear communications, and clear spatiotemporal boundaries, all of which are now outdated. The latest challenge is to incorporate the technological dimension.

5.6 Conclusion

The analyses presented in this chapter show that conflict in digital and hybrid organizations has become a structural element of contemporary work life. It is not an occasional disturbance or a malfunction but a stable component of organizational processes. The widespread introduction of DTs, remote work practices, and platform-mediated systems has profoundly transformed how people collaborate, communicate, and perceive their roles within teams. Consequently, conflict itself changes form: It becomes less visible yet more pervasive and less explicit yet more deeply embedded in everyday dynamics. Within this scenario, technostress emerges as a key lens through

which to understand the origins and evolution of conflicts (Subiyanto et al., 2024). It not only produces overload or individual strain but also has a direct impact on team functioning, organizational climate, and perceptions of fairness. The various forms of technostress – from information overload to the blurring of personal boundaries – generate micro-tensions that, if left unrecognized, can evolve into relational problems, erosion of trust, and co-ordination difficulties (Hinds & Bailey, 2003). Likewise, growing digital interdependence makes relationships more fragile, especially when communication becomes fragmented, asynchronous, or deprived of emotional cues. The dynamics of virtual and hybrid teams further highlight this fragility (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). Physical distance reduces opportunities for spontaneous interaction, while symbolic distance – linked to differences in visibility among members – can fuel feelings of exclusion or unfairness. Cultural, linguistic, and organizational differences intersect with the technological features of work tools, creating new areas of vulnerability (Höddinghaus, 2024). In the absence of clear modes of co-ordination, decision-making, and information sharing, even simple tasks can become fertile ground for misunderstandings and persistent conflict. In such a complex context, digital leadership plays a decisive role. Leaders are required not only to co-ordinate activities and ensure results but also to maintain cohesion, trust, and a sense of belonging in environments characterized by distance and fragmentation. It becomes essential to interpret weak signals of discomfort, establish clear communication norms, define realistic boundaries of availability, and promote practices that support psychological well-being (Froese, 2025). Leadership must therefore integrate a sociotechnical understanding of work, recognizing that every technological choice affects relationships, identities, and the overall organizational climate. From this perspective, technostress functions as a meaningful indicator of how effectively an organization is navigating digital transformation. It highlights not only individual difficulties in adapting to new tools but also deeper misalignments in processes, expectations, and co-ordination mechanisms (Bass, 1985). When technology-related tensions are ignored or treated solely as personal issues, they tend to solidify into widespread discomfort, reduced collaboration, and deteriorating trust. Conversely, when organizations openly acknowledge the challenges generated by hyperconnectivity, role overlap, or fragmented communication, they can transform these signals into opportunities for improvement. Through clear rules, inclusive processes, and leadership that is attentive to people's real needs, conflict becomes an indicator of what requires rethinking and a stimulus for redesigning more equitable and sustainable practices.

Ultimately, conflict in the digital era should not be viewed as an obstacle to cooperation but as a phenomenon that – when managed with awareness – reveals the areas in which the organization must evolve (Kloepfer, 2025).

Technologies, relationships, and processes are now increasingly intertwined; for this reason, understanding the tensions emerging from their interaction is essential for building workplaces capable of supporting innovation, well-being, and high performance. Addressing technostress and conflict does not mean eliminating difficulties but developing a collective ability to interpret and transform them (Li & Yazid, 2025). Through targeted interventions, shared rules, and a conscious use of technology, organizations can convert potentially disruptive tensions into resources for developing new ways of collaborating, making more inclusive decisions, and fostering work environments that are sustainable, resilient, and capable of navigating uncertainty.

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6 Innovative HRM Practices and Stress Management

The Role of Gamification in Modern Organizations

Caterina Galdiero

6.1 Introduction

The utilization of technology in professional environments and its effect on well-being are subjects of mounting interest among individuals, organizations, and societies. Conceptually, the attribution of well-being at its broadest level combines the concepts of "feeling good" and "functioning effectively." Attention to well-being has become a global concern for individuals, organizations, and states alike. The UN has included "Good Health and Well-being" among its SDGs. This phenomenon carries profound implications for organizational entities, as evidenced by numerous studies that point to work-related stress as a primary contributor to long-term absenteeism. At both the individual and organizational levels, it is necessary to acknowledge that job quality plays a crucial role in determining employee satisfaction and productivity. Consequently, it is imperative that HR practices are meticulously formulated to engender work environments that are conducive to well-being. In addition to major demographic trends that may influence workplace well-being – such as an ageing workforce and the growing emphasis on extending working life (Vickerstaff et al., 2008; Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013), increased geographical mobility of the labour force (Redman et al., 2009), and concerns about job insecurity (De Cuyper et al., 2008) – the intensive use of technology has made HRM an increasingly complex practice (Galdiero & Zifaro, 2025). Consequently, employee well-being is becoming central to HR management and is closely linked to key outcomes such as corporate performance. Consequently, innovative policies can be adopted to mitigate the negative effects of technology use in the workplace. The present chapter seeks to examine which HR practices are most effective across different organizational contexts to maximize positive outcomes for well-being, given the ever-growing technological intensity within organizations. These dynamics have precipitated substantial changes that are reshaping both the role of HR professionals and their practices. These changes occur within the broader transformation of the nature of work itself.

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6.2 HR Policies and Practices in Stressful Work Environments

This study acknowledges that further exploration is required into the interactions among HRM, employee well-being, and organizational performance. The impact of technology on well-being is complex and multifactorial, encompassing physical, psychological, social, organizational, and environmental dimensions (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010). Theoretical models, including Karasek's job demand–control model (1985) and the JD–R model, have contributed to the identification of variables that influence workplace well-being. These frameworks underscore the significance of available resources in mitigating the adverse effects of job demands, including those exacerbated by high technological workloads. The provision of social and emotional support through positive interpersonal relationships has been demonstrated to serve as a resource that can alleviate work-related stress. The establishment of supportive relationships with colleagues and supervisors has been demonstrated to be efficacious in the mitigation of the emotional and physical strain engendered by technologies that render employees constantly available, thereby engendering new forms of stress. The perception of job demands can be modified by factors such as appreciation and support from supervisors or harmonious relationships among colleagues. In the contemporary era of pervasive workplace technology, interpersonal relationships are frequently subjected to strain or disruption, resulting in elevated levels of stress. This reflection is essential to the redesign of HR policies from a holistic perspective – one that addresses the shared responsibilities of individuals and organizations in promoting workplace well-being, while deepening the understanding of how HR practices influence both employee well-being and corporate performance. Among the challenges in sustaining well-being, alongside new leadership models and workload control mechanisms, technology itself can become a positive tool in HR management. In accordance with the findings of Peccei and Van De Voorde (2019), it is evident that not all human resource practices are inherently oriented towards well-being. It has been asserted by scholars such as Calvard and Sang (2017), as well as Alfes et al. (2021), that a holistic approach to well-being is necessary. This approach must recognize the role of the workplace context, organizational models, and the intensity of technology use in shaping HR practices. It is evident that HR practices serve as the most prominent indicators of less overt organizational characteristics, such as goals and values. Consequently, they signify the degree to which emphasis is placed on safeguarding employee well-being in technology-intensive environments. However, the literature pertaining to HR practices is characterized by a lack of clarity regarding their definition, thereby further complicating the comprehension of their impact on well-being and performance. Recent reviews

have sought to rebalance the academic discourse; however, debate remains as to whether HRM practices yield mutual benefits for both employees and organizations, or whether conflicting outcomes arise when corporate objectives undermine individual well-being. In either case, the restoration of equilibrium between HRM practices and well-being may assist organizations in achieving their strategic objectives while concurrently ensuring individual and organizational well-being through the reduction of stress levels. From a theoretical standpoint, the job demand–control model developed by Karasek (1990) was among the first to examine the variables influencing workplace well-being, later incorporating a "social support" dimension that refers to interactions fostering positive relationships among colleagues and with supervisors. In this theoretical framework, social support is conceptualized as a resource that functions as a cushion to mitigate the impact of work stress. The model posits that appreciation and support from supervisors have the potential to reshape employees' perceptions of challenging workloads, thereby fostering more effective coping strategies and providing a safeguard against adverse emotional states. Positive communication among colleagues has been shown to enhance performance, prevent workplace issues, and improve motivation. Consequently, social relationships function as a "buffer" resource, thereby mitigating stress, particularly during periods of high demand. More recently, the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) has expanded this theoretical lens, distinguishing between challenge demands and hindrance demands (Crawford et al., 2010). Since its initial formulation (Demerouti et al., 2001), the JD-R model has become one of the most influential frameworks for studying occupational stress. In accordance with the model, all occupations are distinguished by a combination of demands and resources. These elements can exert a positive influence, manifesting in phenomena such as work engagement, or a negative influence, leading to outcomes such as burn-out. These effects are realized through two parallel processes: energetic and motivational (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job demands are defined as "those physical, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs" (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). Such demands may include conflicts or work overload. Conversely, job resources are defined as "those physical, social, or organisational aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reducing job demands and associated costs, or stimulating personal growth and development" (p. 501). These dynamics give rise to two processes. The health impairment process posits that excessive demands, without sufficient recovery, lead to constant activation and depletion of energy, resulting in exhaustion, psychosomatic symptoms, and health deterioration. In contrast, the motivational process posits that job resources satisfy psychological needs for autonomy and competence, thereby fostering

engagement and motivation. In summary, job demands refer to the psychosocial aspects of work requiring cognitive and emotional effort, while job resources denote physical, psychosocial, or organizational features that support goal attainment, stimulate learning and growth, and reduce associated psychophysiological costs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). It is evident that demands and resources evoke two interconnected yet distinct processes. Firstly, an energetic process, where excessive demands result in the exhaustion of physical and mental resources, is leading to burn-out. Secondly, a motivational process, where abundant resources enhance engagement and persistence towards goals, is benefiting both individuals and organizations (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In this relationship, workers actively shape their roles – a process known as job crafting – by reorganizing tasks and interactions to align their work with personal motivations. Job crafting has been shown to enhance satisfaction, motivation, and productivity among employees, thereby transforming work from mere execution into a space for personal and professional expression. Technology, in this sense, functions as an amplifier of both demands and resources: It can act as a stressor or as a motivator that mitigates stress. Consequently, HR management practices must consider whether they facilitate the development of the resources necessary to manage job demands effectively and whether they encourage the establishment of social support networks. These considerations have a significant impact on employee well-being. In order to comprehend the relationship between HRM and well-being, it is necessary to examine HR policies not only as sets of practices but also as processes. This involves analysing how they are designed, implemented, and evaluated towards the ultimate goal of collective well-being through individual well-being. It is imperative to investigate employers' rationales for adopting specific HR practices, as well as employees' perceptions of these practices (Nishii et al., 2008) and their favourable or unfavourable impacts on well-being (Edgar et al., 2017). While a substantial body of research on workplace well-being operates at the individual level – focusing on how employees manage their own well-being – this chapter emphasizes the importance of broader organizational and contextual factors influencing well-being, particularly the HR function's role in activating "social support" mechanisms. A holistic approach, as advocated by Loretto et al. (2005), provides a valuable framework for future research in this area. It is imperative that both employees and organizations derive mutual benefit from HR policies and practices that are designed to enhance well-being and reduce stress levels. Within this logic, technology can be re-envisioned not only as a potential source of stress but also as an unprecedented opportunity to integrate playful dynamics into organizational contexts. In general, gamification – the application of game elements in non-game environments – has proven to be an effective

tool for increasing motivation, engagement, and learning, with a significant positive impact on reducing work-related stress.

6.3 The Practice of Play as an HRM Strategy

New HRM practices and policies are becoming part of the traditional repertoire available to HR professionals. Among these, in recent years, a novel practice has garnered mounting attention within the domain of HR management: the utilization of play as a medium for social support. In his seminal work *Homo Ludens* (Frissen et al., 2015), Johan Huizinga conceptualizes play not only as a leisure activity but also as a fundamental element of human culture. The author posits that play is a foundational element of social development, functioning as a catalyst for growth, innovation, and engagement. This assertion is further supported by the assertion that play can concurrently serve to mitigate stress and feelings of alienation. The present study explores the adoption of play-based practices by managers, drawing upon Huizinga's concept of the magic circle. The magic circle metaphorically delineates the rules of play and the binding nature of these rules. This study invites consideration of organizations as arenas of regulated freedom. Play also manifests in sports practices, where stadiums, fields, or playgrounds become sacred spaces in which individuals suspend their everyday identities to adopt roles defined by the rules of the game. In social systems such as organizations, offices, factories, or even virtual meetings, individuals perform specific roles on a metaphorical stage. The parallels that can be drawn between sports and organizational systems are striking: Both thrive on a clear sense of purpose, shared rules, and immediate feedback, generating intrinsic motivation that is rarely found within traditional workplaces. The flow state described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) is more readily attainable in games than in work contexts, due to the presence of clear goals, visible progress, and outcomes that carry deep significance for participants. It is evident that sports, as distilled social structures, embody such factors as cooperation, competition, and mastery. These elements have been shown to enhance and strengthen relationships between colleagues and superiors, while concomitantly reducing stress levels. Conversely, organizational contexts frequently exhibit a paucity of such clarity, resulting in the emergence of conflictual dynamics among peers or between employees and superiors. However, the domain of sports offers a valuable model for comprehending and delineating systems of rules and relationships. Athletes enter the field with a clear understanding of their objectives, the rules of play, and the meaning of their actions within the game. For these individuals, the demands and resources inherent in their professional roles are in alignment, thereby activating an energetic process that is synchronized with a motivational one. This dynamic enables sustained

focus and persistence in the pursuit of professional goals. The engagement of individuals in sporting activities is underpinned by the satisfaction of fundamental psychological needs, namely the desire for mastery, autonomy, and purpose. In the 2009 publication of his seminal work, Daniel Pink (2010) identifies the following elements as being of crucial importance in the context of motivation. Within the domain of sports, mastery is quantifiable, autonomy exists within the confines of the established rules, and purpose is intrinsic to the act of playing itself. Conversely, organizational environments frequently disregard these factors, resulting in employees being confined to ambiguous tasks, bureaucratic constraints, and meaningless routines. This, in turn, contributes to employee alienation and stress. Furthermore, sports provide a robust narrative framework, characterized by a heroic structure with antagonists, allies, and victories. Conversely, office work frequently lacks a compelling storyline, leaving participants disoriented in an endless sequence of disconnected tasks. Mary Jo Hatch (1997) emphasizes in her model of cultural dynamics that organizations, much like games, are cultural constructions composed of symbols, artefacts, and rituals that shape behaviour. The "game of business" is characterized by the dynamics of competition in the market, internal political manoeuvring, and the utilization of performance metrics. However, beyond the metaphorical value, the playful dimension can also be harnessed to train soft skills and to prevent work from becoming mechanical and alienating. Huizinga's insight that civilization emerges and unfolds in and as play invites a reconsideration of traditional organizational paradigms. The elements that engender engagement in games – namely, clear rules, immediate feedback, meaningful narratives, and autonomy – should be consciously integrated into the design of everyday work. In the context of increasingly complex organizational landscapes, the concept of play assumes a heightened significance. The reintroduction of play, clarity, and a sense of adventure within organizational frameworks has the potential to effect a transformation of these entities from rigid, alienating environments into spaces conducive to growth, innovation, and collective participation. As Huizinga reminds us, the concept of "our divided humanity" can be rediscovered precisely in the act of playing together on the great stage of social life.

6.4 Sport as a Strategy for Stress Management in Organizations

For managers, the dynamics of play – especially in the context of sport – represent a strategic lever. The creation of compelling organizational narratives and the adoption of structures reminiscent of those found in games have been demonstrated to foster commitment, creativity, and collaboration. A considerable number of managers express a keen interest in the potential

educational value of the sporting world. This fascination elucidates the success of management books authored by coaches and sports leaders, as well as the appeal of motivational interventions delivered by such figures. Indeed, sport can be regarded as a microcosm of broader society. It functions as an institution that provides researchers with a suitable laboratory for examining values, socialization, stratification, and bureaucracy – structures and processes that mirror those found in social systems. This is of particular pertinence in the context of recent labour market changes, where employee recruitment and retention have become of paramount importance. Research on the entry of new generations into the labour market has demonstrated that they exhibit a tendency to demonstrate reduced loyalty to their employers, hold elevated expectations, and prioritize factors such as salary, career opportunities, work environment, and work–life balance. Consequently, workplaces characterized by intense rhythms and pervasive technology are often perceived as stressful and unattractive. In response to this, a considerable number of studies have been conducted in recent years that have demonstrated the importance of a healthy lifestyle in the workplace. Research has demonstrated that sports activities and employee well-being programmes can influence jobseekers, serving as effective attraction and retention strategies. The present study explores the divergent career priorities of Generation Y and Generation Z (Smit et al., 2015). While members of the former tend to prioritize salary and career prospects when choosing a job, members of the latter place greater emphasis on work–life balance (Smit et al., 2015). Innovative companies that prioritize employee well-being have introduced measures and programmes to enhance satisfaction and health. These so-called wellness programmes, which frequently involve sports participation, have been found to reduce work-related stress, absenteeism, and turnover while increasing job satisfaction. As posited by Baicker et al. (2010), corporate sports programmes are considered a genuine investment, as they serve to reduce costs associated with employee absenteeism and health-related issues. In addition to the provision of services for those who are already active in sports, it is of equal importance to motivate those who are not physically active to engage in regular exercise. In view of the aforementioned points, it is reasonable to hypothesise that individuals seeking employment may give consideration to opportunities and benefits related to sports and wellness when choosing an employer. Despite the findings of recent studies indicating that these are not the primary determinants, factors such as organizational climate, working conditions, and salary remain the most influential (Fedor & Toldi, 2017), followed by career prospects and work–life balance. However, the relevance of sports opportunities and wellness programmes for individuals engaging in regular physical activity is particularly evident. In Italy, the patterns of sports participation are found to be significantly influenced by age. Participation rates are observed to be

higher among younger age groups and demonstrate a decline with increasing age (ISTAT, 2024). The most recent ISTAT data indicate that, in 2024, over 21.5 million people aged three and above engage in one or more sports during their leisure time, representing 37.5% of the population. Of these, 28.7% engage in sporting activities on a regular basis, while 8.7% participate on an occasional basis. Furthermore, 37.1% of participants train three or more times per week, with a higher frequency observed among male participants (40.3%) compared to female participants (32.8%). An examination of long-term trends reveals a positive trajectory. From 1995 to 2024, the proportion of individuals engaging in regular sports practice increased from 26.6% to 37.5%, indicating a substantial rise in participation. Furthermore, continuous engagement has increased from 59% in 2015 to 66.6% in 2024. These figures suggest that employers should pay closer attention to health and wellness programmes. As the proportion of young, physically active individuals grows, sports-related benefits offered by companies may become increasingly attractive to jobseekers. It is recommended that human resources managers consider integrating sports initiatives within HRM practices. Numerous studies have demonstrated that health promotion programmes enhance employee satisfaction, which in turn contributes to reduced turnover rates and increased organizational commitment.

6.5 Gamification: Do Video Games Help Improve Team Performance?

In recent years, the concept of gamification has gained increasing relevance in organizational practices and HRM. The term "gamification" refers to the application of game elements and mechanics in non-game contexts, with the objective of increasing participants' motivation, engagement, and performance (Ferreira-Oliveira et al., 2017). The work of Ferreira-Oliveira et al. (2017) is notable as one of the first systematic literature reviews specifically dedicated to gamification in workplace settings, providing an important contribution to understanding this phenomenon within organizations. The authors' objective is to delineate an overarching framework encompassing extant research, with a view to identifying trends, benefits, limitations, and future perspectives of an emerging approach that is increasingly attracting the attention of organizations oriented towards innovation and employee well-being. The results of the review highlight four main areas of gamification application within organizations: The four key elements of the HRM strategy are as follows: training, recruitment, and performance evaluation; professional learning and development, with a focus on continuous education; sales and internal marketing management, with competition used as a motivational lever; and collaboration and teamwork, fostered through recognition and challenge mechanisms. The most prevalent game mechanics

encompass points, levels, badges, and leader boards, which are instruments that promote immediate feedback, transparency, and constructive competition. The integration of additional elements, such as challenges and missions with progressive goals, is also a common practice. The review of the extant literature reveals a number of positive outcomes with regard to organizational dimensions. These include increased intrinsic motivation, higher employee engagement, improved individual and collective performance, and greater group cohesion. Furthermore, gamification has been demonstrated to enhance job satisfaction and foster a stronger sense of belonging. However, Ferreira-Oliveira et al. (2017) emphasize that such benefits are contingent on the quality of the gamified system's design and its alignment with the organizational context. When game mechanics are implemented in a superficial or coercive manner, adverse effects may ensue, including short-term extrinsic motivation or even resistance among employees. The academic debate often suffers from a lack of standardized measures to assess gamification effects, the use of small or non-representative samples, and a predominance of exploratory or descriptive studies rather than experimental or longitudinal ones. This has resulted in a fragmented understanding of the phenomenon, with limited attention being paid to its long-term effects on employee engagement and well-being. The authors emphasize that gamification possesses a considerable transformative capacity for contemporary organizations, particularly with regard to employee motivation, organizational learning, and innovation in HRM. However, it should be understood as a complementary tool integrated within a broader organizational development strategy that aligns with company culture and values. When consciously designed, gamification in the workplace has been shown to foster motivation, productivity, and collaboration, thereby helping to create an innovative and participatory organizational climate. In recent decades, the complexity of organizational tasks has increased considerably, often necessitating group efforts to achieve goals under pressure. In order to enhance group performance, organizations frequently invest in services designed to strengthen teams through a more practical and cost-effective alternative. This alternative involves leveraging the potential of video games as team-building activities (Carron et al., 2002; Klein et al., 2009). It can thus be posited that gamification can serve as an effective methodology for the management of group relationships. The utilization of video games as a team-building activity has been demonstrated to have a substantial positive impact on the performance of workgroups. The findings of experimental studies demonstrate that both cooperative and competitive games enhance performance, albeit in different ways, and that combining both of these approaches yields optimal results. Technological advances and the dissemination of digital tools, including AI and virtual reality (VR), have engendered novel applications for video games within organizational contexts.

Conventionally regarded as recreational or unproductive activities, video games are now being recognized as tools with the potential to enhance cognitive, communicative and collaborative skills that are relevant to the workplace. Play can therefore be considered an effective means of boosting energy and motivational processes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). While the notion may appear somewhat unconventional, the impact of cooperative and competitive video games on teamwork and team performance is noteworthy. A number of studies have analysed the impact of video games on employee productivity and well-being (Sonnentag et al., 2018). Video games have become an integral part of contemporary culture and, more recently, have been applied in corporate environments to relieve monotony and enhance work performance (Sonnentag et al., 2018). Contrary to the conventional wisdom that viewed play as a hindrance to productivity (Miller & Cohen, 2005), recent literature underscores the potential of playful intermissions to enhance cognitive function, promote social interaction, and elevate professional proficiency (Granic et al., 2014). Empirical studies have demonstrated that teams that engage in cooperative video gaming demonstrate productivity increases of up to 20% in comparison to control groups (Brower, 2019; Freedman & Jin, 2017). The observed outcomes are ascribed to the stress-reducing effects of play (Keith et al., 2018; Scott & Cogburn, 2018) and the enhancement of communication and cohesion among colleagues (Hodent, 2020). Contrary to popular belief, recent research has dispelled the notion that gaming engenders detrimental effects. It has been demonstrated that when gaming is practised in moderation, it can contribute to the development of complex problem-solving, creativity, and decision-making skills. The strategic integration of video games within corporate entities has been demonstrated to enhance collaborative intelligence, thereby optimizing co-ordination and communication within teams (Greitemeyer & Cox, 2013). The integration of controlled gaming intermissions within the workday has been demonstrated to foster relaxation, creativity, and employee motivation, thereby engendering a more dynamic and participatory work environment (Tettegah & Huang, 2015; Rogers, 2016). Despite the negative reputation that video games have acquired over time, there has been a recent reconsideration of this perception. Playing together fosters the development of a more cohesive community within the team, thereby enhancing mutual trust and productivity. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that playing games can lead to a reduction in stress and tension among team members. It is evident that these aspects exert a considerable influence on the dynamics of social support, thereby rendering gaming a noteworthy HRM practice. The impact of games on team performance was discussed in an article published in Forbes, reporting that teams that played a collaborative video game for approximately 45 minutes were 20% more productive than others, whereas traditional team-building exercises failed to achieve

comparable results. In order to reap the benefits of gaming, it is essential for companies to cultivate a "playful culture" and ensure the presence of employees willing to participate (Anastasia & Chaplin, 2005). However, it is imperative to maintain a healthy equilibrium between professional obligations and leisure activities. The activation of specific brain areas and enhancement of cognitive flexibility, defined as the ability to think about multiple concepts simultaneously (Krems, 2014), have been observed in response to certain video games. Players of StarCraft II have been found to experience a reduction in stress levels, an enhancement in relaxation, and an increase in concentration. When participated in collectively, such games have been demonstrated to enhance group spirit and cultivate a sense of unity among members (Keith et al., 2018; Rogers, 2016). Numerous companies have incorporated these games into their corporate culture with the objective of enhancing productivity. The importance of skill in this regard has been demonstrated by numerous scholars (see Griffith et al., 2003). The hypothesis that playing requires only a certain level of skill, regardless of hierarchical position, is supported by evidence that flatter organizational structures encourage cooperation, collaboration, and a friendlier work environment. This, in turn, results in higher profit margins due to increased productivity. Researchers at Brigham Young University have determined that playing video games with colleagues at work can result in a 20% productivity increase (Wang & Brower, 2019). From a scientific perspective, this increase in productivity can be attributed to the body's release of adrenaline during periods of play. Adrenaline, an emergency hormone, has been shown to enhance cognitive abilities temporarily (Krems, 2014). A sudden surge of adrenaline has been shown to lead to an immediate rise in productivity, helping employees to handle competitive work environments (Wang & Brower, 2019). Furthermore, games have been demonstrated to function as stress-relieving activities for individuals engaged in routine or monotonous tasks (Scott & Cogburn, 2018). The introduction of these measures has been shown to engender more enjoyable and engaging workplaces. The positive correlation between workplace happiness and productivity has been well-documented (Scott & Cogburn, 2018; Tettegah & Huang, 2015; Gorjifard & Crawford, 2021). Reduced stress levels in employees have been shown to lead to enhanced creativity and productivity. Furthermore, the potential of video games to enhance communication and dismantle hierarchical structures within organizations has been acknowledged (Hodent, 2020). Consequently, games have the capacity to engender an environment characterized by fearlessness, enjoyment, and camaraderie, thereby enhancing work quality. In response to the query regarding the existence of disparities among employees with regard to their inclination towards gaming, research findings indicate the presence of such differences. A survey of 833 employees revealed a positive correlation between high levels of stress and job-related

fatigue on the one hand and the playing of games at work on the other hand. Employees reported a reduction in fatigue and tension levels following gaming activities. Furthermore, those receiving less social support at work were more inclined to engage in problematic gaming behaviour, particularly in circumstances where colleagues or supervisors did not provide adequate support. It is therefore the case that the dynamics of social interaction in the workplace, in addition to the environmental factors and stress levels experienced by employees, serve as determining factors in the decision of whether or not employees engage in gaming. The term "virtual games" is a broad one, encompassing a variety of forms of entertainment that are distinct from traditional video games. VR games are characterized by their ability to fully immerse users in digital environments through the use of specialized headsets. In the context of VR, the immersive experience engages multiple sensory faculties, with sounds and visuals so captivating that players become completely absorbed in the game, to the extent that they lose track of reality. This phenomenon is referred to as sensory immersion. Games present players with a multifaceted challenge, necessitating equilibrium between their own capabilities and the demands of the game. The overcoming of these challenges has been shown to engender a sense of achievement and to lead to challenge-based immersion (Greitemeyer & Cox, 2013). It is through the process of imaginative immersion that players are able to identify with fictional characters, experience empathy towards them, and derive a sense of enjoyment from the experience. The flow state, defined as a "balance between perceived challenge and individual skill" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), occurs when an individual becomes fully absorbed in an activity to the extent that they lose track of time. The practice of gaming has been demonstrated to facilitate the recognition of errors, the improvisation of solutions, and the exploration of novel approaches. Play thus becomes an end in itself, fostering the concept of team cohesion, which is predicated on the notion that it serves to reduce conflict and enhance effective communication. Secondly, commitment towards shared goals is evident through both competitive and cooperative elements. Thirdly, intrinsic pleasure is posited as a factor that sustains motivation. The authors also integrate entrainment theory (Ancona & Chong, 1999) to explain how positive norms and dynamics developed during play can transfer to subsequent work activities, reinforcing collaborative behaviours and team self-correction. Recent research has focused on the prosocial effects of cooperative gaming, demonstrating that interaction in collaborative game environments can promote helping behaviours and solidarity (Gentile, 2011; Ferguson, 2011). It is noteworthy that cooperative play, even in violent game contexts, has been shown to reduce hostility and enhance co-operation (Eastin, 2007; Fedor & Toldi, 2017). These findings are consistent with those reported by Ewoldsen et al. (2012), who observed an increase in cooperative behaviour following

cooperative gaming sessions. However, the present study is distinguished by the introduction of a control condition and the assessment of effects after a two-week period, thereby demonstrating that cooperative gameplay can engender enduring prosocial effects on collaboration and group performance. In conclusion, the findings confirm that video games – far from being mere pastimes – can serve as effective tools for promoting social and cooperative skills. However, the nature of interaction – whether cooperative or competitive – is crucial. Competition has been shown to amplify aggression and reduce cohesion, while cooperation has been demonstrated to foster prosocial behaviours and enhance teamwork (Deutsch, 1973; Johnson et al., 1983).

6.6 Gamification in Organizations Between Exploration and Exploitation: Between Creativity and Efficiency

The study by Parmentier and Picq (2016) analyses the manner in which small firms in the video game industry manage creative teams within a context characterized by organizational ambidexterity. This term, coined by March (Wilden, 2018), refers to the simultaneous need to reconcile the logics of exploration and exploitation. The creative industries, which are predicated on the combination of symbolic content, human capital, and technology, must confront the inherent tension between innovation and productive optimization. In the context of video game studios, this tension is characterized by a dual requirement: to experiment with new concepts and technologies and to rationalize processes in a manner that aligns with the economic constraints imposed by publishers. In the absence of sufficient resources with which to structurally differentiate between the two activities, small and medium-sized enterprises have been observed to develop forms of contextual and temporal ambidexterity. These forms of ambidexterity are based on trust, autonomy, and shared goals. Creativity, understood as the bridge between exploration and exploitation, becomes the main integrating mechanism, fostering both radical innovation and incremental improvement. In a multiple case study of 11 French video game development studios, the authors identify seven managerial practices that support creativity while maintaining organizational efficiency. These practices include diversity and complementarity of skills, frequent interactions and dense networks, a culture of creativity, proximity leadership, managerial flexibility, knowledge capitalization, and widespread involvement in the creative process. The implementation of these practices fosters the establishment of a collaborative and trusting environment, thereby enabling the coexistence of two distinct organizational logics. This, in turn, enables teams to demonstrate a high degree of adaptability in response to the requirements of individual projects. In this framework, creativity is not directly managed but

rather enabled through favourable social and managerial conditions, thus confirming that ambidexterity in small and medium-sized creative enterprises is a collective rather than a structural construction. The video game industry thus emerges as a paradigmatic exemplar of ambidextrous management in which the synergy among human capital, relational leadership, and continuous learning enables a sustainable balance between innovation and performance (Parmentier & Picq, 2016). Gamification can be considered an ambivalent mechanism in the sense that, on the one hand, it fosters socialization and cooperation within work teams; on the other hand, however, it has the potential to intensify conflicts, individualism, or relational overload. In the context of HRM and well-being management, it assumes a therapeutic value. The application of gamification in a management context is characterized by a multifaceted nature, wherein the presence of both beneficial elements and potential hazards is concomitant, thereby substantiating the intricate nature of the phenomenon (Deterding, 2019). At the organizational level, gamification has been shown to transform corporate culture, increase motivation (Kananen & Akpinar, 2015), and facilitate the identification of talents and transversal skills (Georgiou et al., 2019; Chamorro-Premuzic, 2017). The replacement of monetary incentives with symbolic rewards has been demonstrated to engender a reduction in costs. Furthermore, the utilization of such a system functions as a tool of both control and co-ordination (Deterding, 2019). However, these benefits are accompanied by unexpected and counterintuitive effects on organizational structures (Mollick & Werbach, 2015). From a psychological perspective, gamification has been demonstrated to enhance motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction (Kumar & Raghavendran, 2015; Shahri et al., 2019), thereby satisfying the needs for competence and autonomy (Deterding, 2019). It has been hypothesized that the phenomenon may reduce stress and enhance well-being, but in some cases, it has been observed to provoke anxiety, loss of self-esteem, and competitive stress (Algashami et al., 2017). Excessive competition or negative feedback has been demonstrated to engender a decline in intrinsic motivation and the development of gamification burn-out (Sailer & Homner, 2020). In the domain of knowledge management, gamification has been shown to promote the creation and dissemination of knowledge (Araújo & Pestana, 2017). However, it has also been observed that gamification may potentially reinforce dynamics of dominance and surveillance. In the context of HRM, the concept has been shown to promote recruitment and employee motivation (Jain & Dutta, 2019), yet it may also result in internal conflicts, free-riding, and loss of cohesion (Shahri et al., 2019; Algashami et al., 2017). In conclusion, the extant literature confirms that the benefits and risks of gamification in management are inseparable. It represents a complex and contradictory phenomenon, capable of not only improving productivity, motivation, and learning but

also introducing new forms of stress, control, and alienation (Wanick & Bui, 2019). These results suggest the need to carefully assess contextual risks and to situate gamification within a broader cultural and philosophical framework consistent with its dual nature as both a game and a managerial tool (Fresiello et al., 2017).

6.7 Gamification and Work-Related Stress: Moderating Effects on Employee Performance

Organizations are beginning to understand that their true strategic asset is human capital. To implement successful strategies, organizations feel the need to create workplaces where employees can find comfortable environments. The issue of stress: In the academic debate on managing work-related stress, gamification is proposed as a moderating variable in the relationship between stress and employee performance (Sarangi & Shah, 2015; Benitez et al., 2022). Gamification, defined as the integration of game elements within non-game contexts, has been empirically validated as an effective approach to enhance engagement and motivation in educational, training, and performance management settings (Deterding, 2019). However, prior literature had largely neglected to systematically investigate the moderating role of gamification in existing organizational dynamics, particularly in the link between job stress and individual productivity. Game mechanics have been shown to mitigate the adverse effects of stress on employee performance, thereby helping to maintain high levels of productivity even in high-pressure professional contexts (Smith & Basak, 2023). The theoretical framework of occupational stress proposed by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH, 1999) defines it as a harmful physical and emotional response resulting from an imbalance between job demands and individual resources. As demonstrated in the relevant literature (Luthans, 2010; Luthans et al., 2020; Reilly et al., 2014), high levels of stress have been shown to reduce satisfaction, motivation, and performance, with the resultant outcomes including dysfunction such as absenteeism and burn-out. However, as posited by some authors (Luthans, 2010; Luthans et al., 2020), moderate levels of stress can also stimulate productivity and resilience. In this context, gamification is proposed as a tool capable of enhancing intrinsic motivation through the use of elements such as points, leader boards, rewards, and immediate feedback, which make work activities more meaningful and engaging. Some studies offer an innovative perspective on the relationship between video games and stress, offering an innovative vision that contrasts with the conventional point of view that has historically associated digital games with harmful effects on psychological well-being (Reer & Quandt, 2019; Pallavicini et al., 2018). The authors propose video games as tools capable of promoting relaxation, cognitive distraction, and

emotional regulation, thus aligning with the broader field of positive psychology and interactive media studies. From this standpoint, video games are not merely regarded as a form of entertainment; rather, they are seen as a potential medium for promoting mental well-being and individual coping strategies for stress. The authors define stress as a psychophysiological response to factors perceived as threatening or excessive relative to the individual's coping resources. Video games, due to their immersive and interactive nature, act on this response through several coping mechanisms, including cognitive distraction, which diverts attention from external stressors; emotional catharsis, which allows the channelling of negative emotions in a safe and controlled environment; and psychological recovery, facilitated by the sense of control and competence experienced during play. Furthermore, in the context of multiplayer games, the presence of social interaction and a sense of belonging has been demonstrated to facilitate the strengthening of social support, a phenomenon that has been identified as a protective factor against stress. Video games have been employed as a stress management strategy, particularly following days characterized by high emotional demands, with a notable reduction in perceived stress occurring subsequent to brief periods of gameplay. The sense of control and progression experienced during play has been demonstrated to contribute to the restoration of personal self-efficacy and the improvement of emotional well-being. Furthermore, cooperative multiplayer games have been shown to foster social support and cohesion, thereby reducing perceptions of isolation and anxiety. However, the authors also emphasize that excessive or compulsive gaming may generate the opposite effects, namely stress and relational dysfunctions. In this sense, video games can be considered a flexible medium, the impact of which is contingent on the context of use, individual motivations, and the degree of self-regulation. The discussion highlights how video games can be understood as a contemporary form of behavioural and cognitive coping that integrates entertainment with emotional self-regulation. The activity, characterized by its playful nature, has been shown to engender physiological relaxation through the presentation of clear and rewarding tasks. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated to reinforce a sense of competence and to promote the development of digital social spaces that are capable of providing reciprocal emotional support. The game design can be oriented towards psychological well-being goals by incorporating mechanics that stimulate mindfulness, empathy, and self-control. This perspective gives rise to significant implications for fields such as occupational psychology, education, and digital therapy. In conclusion, several studies offer a balanced and innovative view of the relationship between video games and mental health, demonstrating that digital gaming, when used consciously, can be an effective tool for stress management (Reer & Quandt, 2019;

Pallavicini et al., 2018). A quantitative empirical study was conducted on 310 non-managerial employees of commercial banks. The study confirmed that gamification significantly mitigates the negative impact of stress on job performance. In high-pressure contexts, employees exposed to gamified systems have been shown to exhibit increased motivation, concentration, and a sense of control, perceiving work as more manageable and rewarding. The integration of game elements, including challenges and symbolic rewards, fosters an environment conducive to enjoyment and self-regulation, thereby serving as a protective factor against burn-out. It can therefore be posited that gamification can serve as an effective moderator between stress and performance, transforming tension-filled situations into motivating and productive experiences. This approach provides a novel framework for future studies that seek to explore the psychological and organizational mechanisms underpinning this relationship. Furthermore, it offers a basis for the development of customized gamification models for diverse professional contexts.

6.8 Conclusion

The utilization of games has been identified as a potential intervention strategy to address technostress. The introduction of video games to the consumer market approximately 50 years ago has resulted in a gradual yet discernible escalation in their societal and cultural influence, to the extent that they are now considered a foundational element of modern society and culture. Initially regarded as mere entertainment objects, the design and/or use of video games for other purposes has been regarded as a logical step to harness the motivation and engagement that users experience while playing. Video games, termed "Serious Games," are thus generally defined as [games] that do not have entertainment, enjoyment, or pleasure as their primary purpose but rather as a mental contest, played with a computer according to specific rules, that uses entertainment to promote training, education, health, public policy, and strategic communication objectives of government or corporate entities. The utilization of Serious Games as a component of HRM practices entails the employment of game mechanics and dynamics to facilitate the development of specific skills and competencies, the conveyance of targeted information or messages, and the reinforcement of knowledge or awareness acquired while the user is engaged in an immersive environment. In such a setting, users have the opportunity to "learn by doing" and "learn from mistakes" in a controlled environment that fosters the development of knowledge, skills, and competencies. Additionally, this approach can enhance teamwork, social skills, leadership, and collaboration. In order to achieve optimal efficacy, the

game mechanics and dynamics that are adopted must be selected according to the intended serious objectives. It is evident that HR professionals employ the ludic function to achieve corporate objectives by reducing stress levels and offering a relaxed and enjoyable approach to work. There is an emerging corpus of evidence to suggest that participation in sporting activities can have a variety of positive effects on individuals' well-being and stress management. Such activities can assist individuals in recuperating from stress, regulating their emotions more effectively, utilizing adaptive stress management strategies, and reducing stress levels by providing biofeedback information. Moreover, since the 1990s, the value of simulation games in training has been recognized, for example, in the training of crisis management skills or crew resource management. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of games that comprehensively address the critical skills required for work-related stress management and resilience, particularly in the context of technostress management. The game concept is predicated on a role-playing approach in three dimensions and in a virtual environment. The integrated series of scenarios offers a rich, experiential, and immersive experience that enables participants to understand the choices available to them and the implications of those choices when facing simulated situations where stress arises from the use of DTs in the workplace. The concept of role-playing is also applied in defining a series of character attributes related to technostress, whose values vary based on monitoring player progress through gameplay analytics. This enables the evaluation of player performance and the achievement of learning outcomes. The game has been designed to be utilized by both employees and employers, with similar scenarios being presented from different perspectives. The objective of this design is to facilitate the training of both target groups, with the aim of assisting employees in coping with technostress and enabling employers to implement support strategies to prevent technostress among their workforce (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Such games have been shown to facilitate the development of skills that are pertinent to a range of challenging scenarios, including resilience, emotion regulation, decision-making and problem-solving, control, task and time management, communication, support, motivation, and delegation strategies. The game appears to function effectively at the most fundamental cognitive levels, encompassing comprehension and awareness of fundamental concepts and operations (Alfes et al., 2021). However, more complex cognitive aspects, such as a full understanding of what technostress is and how it may be perceived differently by employees and employers, have not yet been comprehensively addressed. The utilization of virtual games has been identified as a potential strategy for managers to plan for and mitigate the occurrence and negative consequences of technostress in the workplace.

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7 Prosocial Activities as a Tool for Organizational Well-Being

Vincenzo Auriemma

7.1 Introduction

In the contemporary world, characterized by escalating environmental, social, and technological intricacy, organizations confront unparalleled challenges in preserving well-being, cohesion, and intrinsic sustainability. The processes of market globalization, accelerated digitalization, and the ongoing transformation of working conditions have profoundly redefined relational models and organizational dynamics, introducing new tensions between efficiency and humanity, and productivity and well-being. In this scenario, the concept of prosociality emerges as a fundamental theoretical and operational category for understanding how organizations can preserve their psychological and relational health while promoting forms of collaboration, solidarity, and shared responsibility. The term "prosociality" refers to the set of voluntary behaviours aimed at benefiting other people or the community, without expectations of direct reward (Batson, 2011). Such behaviours, which include helping, empathy, cooperation, and generosity, represent a constitutive dimension of social life and also take on strategic value within organizational contexts. In complex organizations, prosociality manifests itself through actions such as mentoring, peer support, cross-functional collaboration, corporate volunteering, and community engagement. These practices have been demonstrated to assist in the generation of social capital, the strengthening of bonds of trust, and the establishment of a shared sense of belonging (Grant & Dutton, 2012). As Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) have demonstrated in their seminal work on positive organizational psychology, the quality of interpersonal relationships has been shown to be an essential predictor of both individual and collective well-being. In this context, prosocial activities assume a transformative role. They not only enhance subjective well-being but also contribute to the establishment of work environments characterized by trust, reciprocity, and resilience. Prosocial organizations are distinguished by their ability to promote empathetic, inclusive, and caring work environments, where competition gives way to

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cooperation and performance is understood as a shared rather than an individual achievement (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). From a theoretical standpoint, prosociality constitutes a pivotal element of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), signifying those discretionary behaviours that, despite not being formally stipulated by roles, contribute to the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988). In this sense, prosociality is not only a set of altruistic acts but also a form of active participation in organizational life that strengthens the cohesion and sustainability of the system. It functions as a "relational glue," capable of connecting the economic, social, and psychological dimensions of the organization, thereby creating a network of positive interdependencies that promote adaptability to complex contexts (Grant & Parker, 2009). Moreover, the standpoint of positive organizational scholarship (POS) (Cameron et al., 2003) has further accentuated the function of prosocial practices in establishing "thriving" organizations. The existence of supportive and mutually trusting relationships has been demonstrated to increase the collective capacity to cope with challenges and generate innovation. In an era characterized by uncertainty and discontinuity, prosociality is emerging as a key organizational competence. Prosociality can be defined as a set of emotional, cognitive, and relational skills that enable individuals and groups to build meaning and coherence within complexity. The prosocial dimension of organizational well-being also assumes ethical and political significance. The concept under discussion refers to the possibility of rethinking work not only as a tool for economic production but also as a space for mutual care and the construction of meaningful social bonds. In this perspective, prosociality is connected to theories of the ethics of care (Tronto, 2013), which focus on responsibility towards others, interdependence, and the importance of practices of attention, listening, and respect. When applied to the organizational context, these principles transform the culture of work into a culture of care, where the value of people and relationships becomes the foundation of overall sustainability. Finally, the reflection on prosociality is part of the broader debate on sustainability and the UN SDGs, particularly with regard to Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). It is evident that prosocial activities contribute directly to the psychological and social well-being of workers and, by extension, to the health of the organization as a living system. The business model that is being promoted is one that is oriented not only towards competitiveness but also towards the regeneration of relationships and collective well-being. In summary, prosociality can be regarded as a paradigm of transformation for twenty-first-century organizations. It signifies a methodology for the integration of ethical, emotional, and relational dimensions into governance models, thereby providing a tangible response to the fragmentation and disconnection that is characteristic of contemporary societies. The following analysis aims to explore the

theoretical, psychological, and systemic roots of this concept, exploring its contribution to the construction of lasting and sustainable organizational well-being.

7.2 Theoretical Foundations of Prosociality in Organizations

The concept of prosociality in organizations is rooted in the fields of social psychology and organizational theory. In these disciplines, prosocial behaviour was initially analysed as an extension of the altruistic mechanisms that regulate human interactions. Since the seminal studies of Batson et al. (1991) and Batson (2011), prosocial behaviour has been defined as any voluntary action taken with the intention of improving the well-being of another individual or group, even at the cost of personal sacrifice. In Batson's view, genuine altruism is rooted in empathy, defined as the ability to perceive and comprehend the emotional states of others. Empathy is considered to be one of the most fundamental motivations underpinning human behaviour. When applied to organizations, this approach suggests that cooperation, mutual aid, and solidarity are not marginal or incidental phenomena but fundamental dynamics for the survival and development of complex social systems. Concurrently, the theoretical framework of OCB has provided a foundational conceptual model for comprehending the expression of prosociality within organizational frameworks. According to Organ (1988), OCB refers to discretionary behaviours that are not directly recognized by a formal reward system, yet which, taken together, promote organizational effectiveness. Such behaviours include a willingness to assist colleagues, loyalty, cooperation, and tolerance of difficulties. The fundamental premise of this study is that the efficacy of an organization is contingent not only on the formally designated roles that individuals assume but also on a set of uncodified prosocial practices that foster cohesion, reliability, and mutual trust. From this perspective, prosociality can be conceptualized as an intangible yet pivotal resource that facilitates organizations in operating in a flexible and resilient manner. The contribution of Grant and colleagues (Grant, 2007; Grant & Mayer, 2009) has further expanded the understanding of prosocial behaviour in terms of motivation. Grant proposes a distinction between prosocial motivation and prosocial behaviour, emphasizing that the former concerns the intention to benefit others, while the latter concerns the actual behavioural manifestation of that intention. This distinction underscores the notion that prosocial practices do not only stem from social norms or role expectations but can also be an articulation of internalized values, identity orientation, and a more extensive sense of purpose (purpose-driven action). This standpoint introduces an ethical and value-based dimension to the discourse on organizational prosociality, highlighting how collective well-being

can become an intrinsic motivational lever and a factor of self-actualization. At the organizational level, social capital theories offer a further interpretative framework for understanding the systemic function of prosocial practices. As Putnam (2000) asserts, the concept of social capital is predicated upon networks of trust, norms of reciprocity, and collaborative relationships that facilitate co-ordination and cooperation for the common good. In organizational contexts, prosociality has been shown to facilitate the development of internal social capital, thereby promoting integration between individuals and groups, as well as encouraging the exchange of knowledge and skills. Adler and Kwon (2002) have highlighted how social capital represents a relational resource that improves organizational performance not only by reducing transaction costs but also by generating trust and spreading norms of reciprocity. In this sense, prosociality can be understood as the operational dimension of social capital, as it transforms trust into action and reciprocity into concrete collaboration. Another relevant theoretical contribution is provided by POS (Cameron et al., 2003), which focuses on the processes and dynamics that promote the well-being and flourishing of people and organizations. From this standpoint, prosociality is regarded as a catalyst for organizational regeneration, with the capacity to foster positive emotions, enhance the working environment, and fortify collective resilience. Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) posit that organizations, which are oriented towards well-being, are not merely efficient workplaces but rather constitute true moral and emotional ecosystems. In such ecosystems, care, empathy, and solidarity become generative forces of sustainability and innovation. Within the paradigm of positive organizational psychology, prosociality is also interpreted as a form of meaningful work. As Steger et al. (2012) contend, the perception of contributing to a cause greater than oneself is a primary source of motivation and well-being. In this sense, prosocial practices foster the connection between the individual self and the collective self, generating a sense of belonging that transcends the mere logic of economic contract. In essence, prosociality serves to reinforce the identity-based aspect of work, thereby transforming it from a mere productive endeavour into an experience imbued with meaning and relational significance. From a systemic perspective, prosociality can also be interpreted through the lens of complexity theory and living systems (Capra & Luisi, 2014). Organizations, as open systems, develop and maintain themselves through processes of continuous interaction and feedback between their members and the surrounding environment. In such systems, cooperation and solidarity are not optional but rather conditions of dynamic equilibrium. The absence of prosocial behaviour has the potential to result in the fragmentation, isolation, and conflict which, in turn, can weaken the system's adaptive capacity. Conversely, the propagation of practices of help and collaboration functions as a homeostatic mechanism that fosters self-organization and collective

resilience. From this perspective, prosociality can be regarded as an emerging property of complex systems, which is essential for their long-term sustainability. The ethics of care theory (Tronto, 2013) introduces a normative and political dimension to the understanding of prosociality. The concept of care, understood as a form of attention to others and responsibility for their vulnerability, becomes a guiding principle of organizational action. The perspective of care suggests that organizational well-being does not derive only from structural or economic factors but also from a relational ethos that values dignity and interdependence among individuals. In this sense, care and prosociality are complementary categories: The former guides moral intentionality, while the latter represents its concrete manifestation. In summary, the theoretical foundations of organizational prosociality delineate a relational paradigm that transcends the dichotomy between the individual and the collective and between efficiency and humanity. Prosociality, understood as both a personal disposition and a social practice, constitutes the connective tissue of organizational life and the basis for building sustainable well-being. The integration of the psychological, social, ethical, and systemic dimensions of work is offered by this framework, which provides an interpretative capacity capable of establishing a connection between individual action and the overall functioning of organizations.

7.3 Prosociality, Well-Being, and Relational Capital in Organizations

The relationship between prosociality and organizational well-being represents a highly fruitful area of study within contemporary work psychology and organizational sciences. A growing body of empirical and theoretical research converges in highlighting that prosocial behaviours, far from being mere expressions of individual altruism, constitute structural mechanisms for building collective well-being and internal relational capital (Grant, 2008; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003/2006). In this sense, prosociality has been shown to enhance the quality of working life while concomitantly strengthening the capacity of the organization to adapt, regenerate, and thrive in complex and uncertain environments. In accordance with the principles of positive organizational behaviour, the concept of organizational well-being may be defined as an emerging condition resulting from social interactions characterized by trust, mutual respect, and cooperation (Luthans, 2002). In this theoretical framework, prosociality is posited as a catalyst for positive relational dynamics, thereby contributing to the establishment of a climate of psychological safety. This is defined as the shared perception of being able to express opinions, emotions, and ideas without fear of judgement or retaliation (Edmondson, 1999). This climate is considered to be one of the fundamental prerequisites for creativity, learning, and organizational innovation

and is nurtured through daily practices of helping, listening, and collaborating. The experience of supportive behaviour from colleagues and leaders has been demonstrated to activate processes of affective reciprocity. These processes have been shown to engender trust and a sense of belonging, which are constituent elements of organizational well-being. Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory provides a further interpretative framework for understanding the relationship between prosociality and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This theory posits that human beings are motivated by three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Prosocial practices, in particular, have been shown to satisfy the need for relatedness, fostering experiences of authentic connection and mutual recognition. Furthermore, by acting altruistically or cooperatively, individuals strengthen their perception of personal efficacy and meaningful contribution, thereby satisfying the need for competence. These processes have been shown to engender heightened intrinsic motivation and an enhanced quality of working life, thus demonstrating how prosociality can act as an intrinsic and sustainable source of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). From a collective standpoint, prosocial endeavours have been shown to engender and cultivate relational capital, which is defined as the aggregate of assets stemming from relationships characterized by trust, collaboration, and reciprocity within a collective or organizational context (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Relational capital is one of the three fundamental dimensions of social capital, together with structural and cognitive capital. It constitutes the ground on which processes of shared knowledge, co-ordination, and innovation develop. By cultivating relationships characterized by trust and mutuality, prosociality has been shown to enhance the density and quality of internal social networks, thereby facilitating the dissemination of information and fostering cross-functional collaboration between organizational units. In other words, it acts as a "social lubricant" (Putnam, 2000), capable of reducing communication friction and increasing the collective capacity to respond to environmental challenges. A pivotal element in the nexus between prosociality and well-being pertains to the function of positive emotions. The broaden-and-build theory, proposed by Fredrickson (2001), posits that positive emotions broaden individuals' cognitive and behavioural repertoires, thereby promoting the development of enduring personal and social resources. The experience of emotions such as gratitude, empathy, and pride has been demonstrated to occur in response to the performance or reception of prosocial acts. These emotions have been shown to have a positive effect on the strengthening of social bonds and the generation of virtuous cycles of cooperation and trust. In an organizational context, these dynamics engender a multiplier effect: The propagation of positive emotions translates into heightened morale, motivation, and a sense of community, with demonstrable effects on well-being and performance (Fredrickson &

Losada, 2005). Prosocial practices have been shown to play a regulatory role in the processes of managing stress and work fatigue. A substantial body of research has demonstrated that environments characterized by prosocial behaviours can serve to mitigate the risk of burn-out, enhance job satisfaction, and augment collective coping skills (Hobfoll, 1989; Halbesleben, 2006). This phenomenon can be attributed to the notion that supportive and trusting relationships provide individuals with emotional and instrumental resources that serve to mitigate the impact of work pressures. Moreover, the opportunity to provide assistance to others engenders a sense of meaning and control, thereby counteracting feelings of helplessness and alienation that are often associated with stressful work environments (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010). Consequently, prosociality can be regarded as a pivotal resource within the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), as it signifies an aspect that enhances the social and psychological resources available to cope with job demands. The job demand–control–support model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) is a complementary explanatory framework. Within this theoretical framework, social support is conceptualized as a pivotal resource that serves to mitigate the adverse consequences of high-strain occupations. The positive effects of supervisor appreciation and colleague cooperation on employees' health include the reshaping of perceptions regarding heavy workloads, the stimulation of effective coping strategies, and the protection of employees' health. Positive vertical relationships (leader → member) and horizontal relationships (peer → peer) have been demonstrated to act as a "stress buffer," thereby reinforcing the core argument that prosocial relational practices are not merely desirable but constitute a preventive mechanism against work-related stress and illness. A further level of analysis concerns the impact of prosociality on the construction of organizational identity. Participation in helping and cooperative behaviours contributes to the formation of a collective identity based on shared values of trust, fairness, and responsibility. This has been shown to strengthen the bond between the individual and the organization, thereby promoting a sense of organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Organizations that encourage prosocial practices cultivate a culture in which success is perceived as an interdependent outcome and where internal competition is superseded by collaboration and mutual learning. This approach has been demonstrated to engender a positive impact on the working environment, while also serving as an effective instrument for cultural governance. It has been observed to guide individual behaviour towards the shared objectives of well-being and sustainability. From a broader standpoint, prosociality can be regarded as an indicator of an organization's moral health. The capacity to establish and maintain prosocial relationships is indicative of the ethical quality of leadership and the congruence between professed values and actual practices. As demonstrated in the extant

literature on ethical and transformational leadership, leaders who embody principles of empathy, justice, and care have been shown to promote the spread of prosocial behaviours in their teams (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Bass & Riggio, 2006). In this sense, prosociality is not only an emerging effect of horizontal relationships but also a cultural construct that depends on the role models proposed by leaders. In summary, the relationship among prosociality, well-being, and relational capital highlights how the value of organizations does not lie exclusively in economic or technological resources but in the quality of the relationships that support them. Prosociality, through its power to engender trust, empathy, and a sense of belonging, represents the invisible foundation of organizational well-being. This approach enables organizations to transform complexity into coherence, diversity into wealth, and vulnerability into collective strength. In this manner, prosociality is transformed into a relational virtue, as well as a principle of systemic sustainability. It is capable of combining efficiency and humanity, and productivity and care, in a dynamic balance oriented towards the common good.

7.4 Prosociality as a Cultural Paradigm of Sustainability and Organizational Complexity

In the contemporary historical period, characterized by systemic transformations and an increasing interdependence among economic, social, technological, and environmental dimensions, prosociality manifests not only as an individual virtue or relational practice but also as a genuine cultural paradigm of organizational sustainability. It is a mode of interpretation and action that lies at the intersection of ethics, complexity, and collective learning, guiding organizations towards forms of cooperative and regenerative coexistence. From this perspective, prosociality is not only a set of altruistic behaviours but also an organizational principle that facilitates a re-evaluation of power dynamics, efficiency logics, and value models within contemporary systems. Complexity theory provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding the transformative role of prosociality. Organizations are understood as complex adaptive systems, comprising a multiplicity of interconnected elements that interact in a non-linear way, thereby generating emergent properties and unpredictable collective behaviours (Stacey, 1996; Capra & Luisi, 2014). In such systems, stability and survival do not derive from centralized control but from the capacity for self-organization and cooperation between parties. Prosociality can be conceptualized as a regulatory principle that fosters cohesion and spontaneous co-ordination, thereby strengthening processes of mutual trust and the distribution of intelligence within the system. This process enables the conversion of uncertainty and vulnerability into resources that facilitate learning and innovation, thereby

enhancing the resilience and adaptability of the organization. Moreover, the systemic perspective of sustainability emphasizes how organizations are ecologically and socially interdependent entities immersed in networks of relationships that transcend traditional boundaries between internal and external. From this standpoint, prosociality can be regarded as a manifestation of ecological intelligence (Bateson, 1972). The promotion of prosocial behaviour is therefore contingent on the cultivation of systemic sensitivity, which acknowledges the other as an integral component of one's own equilibrium. This awareness engenders a transition from a competitive logic to a co-evolutionary logic in which the survival of the system is contingent on the cooperation and well-being of its interrelated components. The integration of prosociality into models of organizational sustainability suggests a significant transformation in the prevailing management culture. Conventional organizations, which are oriented towards optimizing efficiency and profit, characteristically establish internal relationships in accordance with the tenets of hierarchy, control, and competitive individualism. Conversely, a prosocial paradigm is predicated on a culture characterized by trust, active listening, and mutual recognition, wherein value is co-created through collaboration (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In this sense, prosociality is not merely a desirable behaviour; it is a cultural infrastructure that redefines the very conditions of organizational sustainability. It has been demonstrated that such an approach fosters collective learning processes, promotes member empowerment, and enables innovation to be generated from relationships of care and cooperation. From an ethical perspective, prosociality can be viewed as a means of rebalancing in relation to the instrumental aspects of corporate sustainability. In recent years, the concept of sustainability has been incorporated into managerial discourse in a superficial or opportunistic manner, giving rise to forms of greenwashing or purpose washing that divest the term of its transformative meaning (Banerjee, 2011). Conversely, prosociality is predicated on an ethic of responsibility founded on reciprocity, empathy, and relational justice. The concept introduces an element of authenticity and congruence between stated values and actual practices, thereby ensuring that sustainability is not only a marketing objective but also a tangible way of living and acting within the organization. In this sense, prosociality contributes to the construction of "inner sustainability" (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013), based on awareness, connection, and care for human bonds. The relationship between prosociality and complexity can be further elucidated through the lens of organizational learning theories. As posited by Argyris and Schön (1978), organizational learning occurs through cycles of reflection and action, facilitating not only behavioural change but also the modification of cognitive frameworks and value systems. In this process, prosociality functions as a social learning device: Helping and sharing behaviours facilitate the dissemination of tacit knowledge, the

construction of shared meanings, and the ability to learn from collective experience. Moreover, the propensity to assist others and assume responsibility for the collective good serves to fortify the concept of collective agency, which is defined as the perception of being able to exert a positive influence on the organizational context and future prospects. This agency is an essential component of sustainability, as it translates ethical awareness into transformative practice. The extant literature on positive organizational change (Caza & Cameron, 2008) confirms that organizations capable of incorporating prosocial principles into their governance systems demonstrate greater resilience and innovation in crisis contexts. Prosociality can be conceptualized as a self-repair mechanism for social systems; in periods of discontinuity or disruption, behaviours of care and solidarity can reactivate a sense of belonging and shared purpose, thus averting fragmentation and disengagement. In this manner, prosociality not only contributes to the well-being of the individual but also functions as a system of systemic resilience, thereby ensuring the continuity of the system over time. Moreover, the integration of prosociality within sustainability models aligns with the objectives outlined in the UN 2030 Agenda. It is directly associated with multiple SDGs, including Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Prosocial activities have been shown to promote an integrated vision of development in which economic growth is inseparable from human well-being and social justice. Furthermore, the promotion of dialogue, cooperation, and solidarity by prosociality contributes to the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships, which represent the very basis of global sustainable governance (Sachs et al., 2019). The cultural dimension of prosociality thus assumes a paradigmatic value, insofar as it provides organizations with an alternative language with which to address complexity and reinterpret their role in society. This paradigm shift enables a transition from an organizational model that is characterized by control and competition to one that is founded on co-creation, care, and mutuality. In this transformation, prosocial culture acts as a generative principle that guides decision-making processes, relationships, and strategies towards a balance between efficiency and humanity, between performance and well-being, and between external and internal sustainability. In summary, prosociality as a cultural paradigm of sustainability represents a synthesis among the ethics of care, complexity theory, and the systemic perspective of the organization. This transformation of sustainability from a mere regulatory constraint into a fundamental principle of collective life is predicated on the recognition that the well-being of the organization is inextricably intertwined with that of the individuals and communities that constitute it. The dissemination of behaviours conducive to trust, solidarity, and shared responsibility has been demonstrated to engender prosociality, which in turn becomes a structural

element of sustainable evolution. This capacity to combine the human dimension with the ecological one is what makes prosociality a viable catalyst for guiding organizations towards a future that is more equitable, empathetic, and resilient.

7.5 Prosociality, Leadership, and Organizational Culture

The comprehension of prosociality within organizational contexts necessitates a discernment of the pivotal roles played by leadership and organizational culture. Both of these concepts are theorized to represent symbolic and operational structures that shape collective behaviour, guiding the construction of meaning and the quality of relationships. Leadership, in particular, has been shown to act as a catalyst for prosocial processes. Through its values, language, and actions, leadership creates the conditions for trust, cooperation, and solidarity to become distinctive features of organizational functioning. The extant literature on the subject has demonstrated that transformational, ethical, and servant leadership styles have the capacity to promote the spread of prosocial behaviours among members of the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Greenleaf, 1977). The transformational leader is characterized by their ability to inspire and motivate others through the establishment of a shared vision, thereby stimulating a commitment that transcends individual interests and is oriented towards the collective good. This leadership style is predicated on a value dimension that activates mechanisms of identification and reciprocity. Employees, recognizing authenticity and integrity in the leader, tend to reproduce similar behaviours towards their colleagues and the organization itself. Ethical leadership, for its part, integrates a moral orientation into decision-making processes, promoting justice, transparency, and mutual respect. Empathy and responsibility are thus rendered manifest in governance practices, thereby engendering an environment conducive to trust and cooperation (Treviño et al., 2003). Furthermore, the servant leadership model proposed by Greenleaf (1977) interprets leadership as a form of service, thereby subverting the conventional logic of power. Servant leadership is characterized by the selfless dedication of leaders to the growth and well-being of others, fostering an environment of active listening, care, and shared purpose. In an organizational context, this approach fosters a culture of care, wherein prosociality transcends the realm of individual behaviour, becoming a systemic management principle instead. As Tronto (2013) contends, care demands constant consideration for the needs and vulnerabilities of others, along with a collective obligation to cultivate equitable and sustainable relationships. From a cultural perspective, organizations that integrate prosociality into their values and processes tend to develop a specific form of "collective emotional intelligence" (Goleman, 1998). This

intelligence is characterized by the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions at multiple levels, including the individual, interpersonal, and institutional domains. A prosocial organizational culture is thus characterized by widespread empathy, open communication, and an inclusive view of differences. The objective of this approach is not to eradicate conflicts but rather to convert them into opportunities for learning and enhancing interpersonal relationships. The establishment of a prosocial culture necessitates a prolonged period of time, consistent effort, and deliberate intention. The concept of social capital can be traced back to the alignment between stated values and actual practices within a given community or social unit. This alignment is then consolidated through a range of social mechanisms, including rituals, symbols, and policies that serve to render the principles of cooperation and care visible to the members of the group. Corporate volunteering practices, mentoring initiatives, psychological well-being programmes, and inclusion policies are not merely instruments of social responsibility; they are concrete manifestations of an organizational culture that is oriented towards solidarity and sustainability. In essence, a prosocial organizational culture serves as the fundamental environment for the cultivation of organizational sustainability. This approach facilitates the transformation of formal structures into living systems of meaning, wherein individual and collective well-being reinforce each other. By disseminating prosocial values, organizations can transcend the conventional dichotomy between ethics and performance, demonstrating that caring for others is an indispensable condition for effectiveness, rather than an impediment to efficiency.

7.6 Prosociality as an Evolutionary Principle of Sustainable Organizational Well-Being

The theoretical reflection developed in the preceding paragraphs enables us to recognize prosociality as an evolutionary principle of sustainable organizational well-being. It is not merely a series of individual behaviours; rather, it is an underlying logic that regulates the dynamics of complex social systems. In the context of evolutionary biology, cooperation and solidarity have been identified as key survival strategies for both biological species and human communities (Nowak, 2011). When applied to organizations, prosociality can be interpreted as an evolutionary adaptation that facilitates the thriving of organizational systems in environments characterized by uncertainty and interdependence. Sustainability, in this sense, can be defined as the ability to maintain and regenerate the conditions necessary for the long-term life of the system (Meadows, 2008). This capacity is predicated on dynamic equilibrium processes that require flexibility, cooperation, and mutual care. Prosociality, defined as a behaviour and a culture, is the mechanism that enables organizations to preserve their systemic integrity while

adapting to change. This concept can be understood as the social manifestation of autopoiesis, defined as the capacity for self-reproduction through meaningful and generative relationships (Maturana & Varela, 1980). Furthermore, prosociality has been demonstrated to promote the transition to models of organizational flourishing (Keyes & Haidt, 2003), in which the health of the system is not defined by the absence of dysfunction but by the presence of vitality, connection, and meaning. Organizations that incorporate prosociality into their decision-making processes and structures have been shown to develop greater capacity for learning and innovation, as cooperation broadens communication channels and increases the variety of perspectives. Consequently, prosociality emerges as a catalyst for collective intelligence, a catalyst for sustainability, and a criterion for evaluating the ethical and social maturity of contemporary organizations. The prosocial approach to organizational well-being also introduces a new vision of performance. The prevailing paradigm has shifted from an emphasis on the maximization of individual performance to a more nuanced understanding of its role as a dynamic balance among productivity, quality of relationships, and social impact. The success of an organization is not solely measured by economic indicators but rather by its ability to generate trust, equity, and cohesion. In this sense, prosociality contributes to redefining the very notion of value, shifting it from a competitive to a cooperative paradigm. At the systemic level, the propagation of prosocial practices engenders positive feedback effects on the entire social and economic ecosystem. Organizations that adopt a prosocial culture become catalysts for social capital, positively influencing the territories, communities, and stakeholder networks with which they interact (Putnam, 2000; Bryson et al., 2015). The establishment of cooperation and trust has been demonstrated to engender a multiplier effect, thereby reinforcing collective resilience and the sustainability of the system in its entirety.

7.7 Conclusion

Prosociality is a fundamental component in comprehending and fostering organizational well-being in contemporary societies. In an era characterized by complexity, instability, and fragmentation, the construction of sustainable organizations can no longer be based exclusively on criteria of economic efficiency or hierarchical control models. It is imperative to acknowledge that sustainability, conceptualized as a balance among economic, social, and ethical dimensions, emerges from relationships, trust, and the capacity for mutual care. Prosocial activities, as practices of solidarity, empathy, and cooperation, represent a transformative device that allows organizations to regenerate themselves and their context. The cultivation of relational capital, the reinforcement of collective identity, and the enhancement of

resilience in the face of uncertainty are all hallmarks of these practices. From this standpoint, prosociality is not only a moral luxury or an ethical supplement but also a systemic necessity. This condition facilitates the evolution of organizational systems towards forms of life that are more complex, integrated, and sustainable. The organizations of the future will increasingly need to demonstrate an ability to combine competence and compassion, strategy and care, and efficiency and humanity. The challenge is not only to create economic value but also to generate relational and social value, with the acknowledgement that the quality of connections is the primary factor for long-term survival. It can thus be posited that prosociality is representative of not only an ethical ideal but also a principle of organizational design. This is a form of collective intelligence that guides working communities towards a shared and sustainable level of well-being.

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8 LebensFormen, Sustainability, and Happiness in Contemporary Organizations

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8.1 Introduction

Contemporary discourse surrounding organizational sustainability has predominantly emphasized environmental and economic dimensions – carbon footprint reduction, resource efficiency, circular economy principles, and long-term financial viability – while affording comparatively limited attention to the philosophical and existential foundations of human flourishing within organizational contexts (Bansal & Song, 2017). This anthropocentric lacuna reflects a persistent tendency within management scholarship and practice to instrumentalize human factors as means towards organizational ends rather than recognizing human well-being as constitutive of organizational purpose itself. Yet the question of what constitutes good organizational life – what enables humans to thrive rather than merely survive within a work context – represents a fundamental inquiry with profound implications for organizational design, leadership practice, and institutional legitimacy (Sison et al., 2019).

The concept of *LebensFormen* – variously translated as "forms of life," "life forms," or "ways of life" – provides a conceptual apparatus for interrogating these foundational questions through a lens that transcends mere behavioural description to engage with the normative, historical, and transformative dimensions of collective human existence. While Ludwig Wittgenstein's employment of *Lebensform* in his later philosophical work established the term's philosophical currency, emphasizing the socially embedded patterns of language, practice, and meaning-making that constitute human existence (Wittgenstein, 1953), contemporary critical theory, particularly the work of Rahel Jaeggi, has substantially enriched and transformed this concept into a powerful tool for social criticism and emancipatory practice.

Jaeggi's critical rehabilitation of the *LebensFormen* concept in her seminal work *Kritik von Lebensformen* (2014), translated as *Critique of Forms of Life* (2018), represents a decisive intervention that transcends both Wittgensteinian descriptivism and communitarian romanticism. Jaeggi argues that

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forms of life are not merely given backgrounds that must be accepted – as Wittgenstein suggested – but rather constitute problem-solving ensembles subject to immanent criticism, transformation, and potential pathology. Her framework provides resources for distinguishing between successful and failed, rational and irrational, and emancipatory and oppressive forms of life without recourse to ahistorical universalist standards or relativistic resignation. This critical capacity proves essential for organizational analysis, enabling normative evaluation of organizational arrangements without imposing external criteria alien to participants' self-understandings.

Jaeggi's approach draws substantially on the Frankfurt School critical theory tradition, particularly Axel Honneth's recognition theory and his analysis of social freedom (Honneth, 1995, 2014), as well as Hartmut Rosa's social acceleration and resonance theories (Rosa, 2013, 2019). Honneth's framework emphasizes that human subjectivity and agency emerge through intersubjective recognition relationships, with pathologies arising when recognition structures become distorted, reified, or systematically denied. His concept of social freedom, realized through mutual recognition in institutional spheres like intimate relationships, market exchanges, and democratic deliberation, provides normative resources for evaluating whether social arrangements enable or constrain human flourishing. Rosa's acceleration theory illuminates how temporal structures fundamentally shape possibilities for meaningful existence, arguing that contemporary society's acceleration dynamics generate alienation by preventing the resonant relationships with the world, self, and others that constitute a good life. His resonance concept offers phenomenological criteria for evaluating life quality beyond subjective satisfaction or objective achievement.

Applied to organizational contexts, this integrated critical theoretical framework – synthesizing Jaeggi's *LebensFormen* critique, Honneth's recognition theory, and Rosa's acceleration and resonance analyses – directs attention towards organizations as distinctive forms of life that either enable or constrain human flourishing through their structural arrangements, temporal orders, recognition patterns, and resonance possibilities. Organizations constitute not only instrumental co-ordination mechanisms but also comprehensive life contexts profoundly shaping member subjectivities, identities, and existential possibilities. Understanding organizational life requires grasping these constitutive dimensions while maintaining a critical perspective capable of identifying pathological deformations requiring transformation.

This philosophical reorientation proves particularly salient for addressing the sustainability challenge that preoccupies contemporary organizations. Sustainability discourse frequently conceptualizes the problematic in terms of resource constraints, externality management, or intergenerational equity – frameworks that, while valuable, risk perpetuating instrumentalist

orientations treating natural and human systems as stocks of capital requiring prudent management (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). A *LebensFormen* perspective informed by critical theory, by contrast, foregrounds questions of meaning, recognition, resonance, and qualitative existence: What ways of living do organizations enable or foreclose? What recognition structures do organizational practices instantiate? How do organizational temporal orders affect possibilities for resonant relationships? What conceptions of the good life do organizational forms embody, and do these conceptions prove defensible through immanent critique?

The relationship between organizational life and happiness – understood not as transient pleasure or subjective satisfaction but as *eudaimonia* or flourishing involving recognition, resonance, and meaningful self-realization – emerges as a central concern within this framework. Jaeggi (2018) emphasizes that forms of life should be evaluated not against abstract universal principles but through immanent critique, examining whether they successfully solve the problems they themselves generate and whether they enable rather than systematically frustrate member aspirations and needs. Applied organizationally, this suggests evaluating organizational arrangements by examining whether they fulfil their own explicit purposes and implicit promises while enabling member flourishing rather than generating systematic pathologies.

Yet prevailing organizational forms frequently exhibit deep tensions with human flourishing. Work intensification, algorithmic management, precarious employment, meaning deficits, relational fragmentation, and instrumental rationality domination characterize many contemporary employment contexts, generating what critical scholars identify as alienation – estrangement from work products, productive activity, human nature, and fellow humans (Fleming, 2014; Jaeggi, 2014). The technostress phenomena examined in preceding chapters exemplify these tensions: Technology-enabled constant connectivity, performance monitoring, and work acceleration may enhance productivity metrics while simultaneously eroding recovery, autonomy, and meaning – the very conditions enabling flourishing. From a critical *LebensFormen* perspective, such arrangements represent not only suboptimal efficiency but also failed forms of life requiring fundamental transformation.

This chapter develops an integrative framework linking *LebensFormen* analysis, organizational sustainability, and happiness by examining how organizational arrangements enable or constrain human flourishing within digitally transformed work contexts. We argue that authentic organizational sustainability – sustainability worthy of the name – requires transcending narrow economic or environmental conceptualizations to embrace social sustainability: the cultivation of organizational forms of life consonant with human dignity, recognition, resonance, and meaningful self-realization. This expanded conception necessitates philosophical reflection on the good

organizational life alongside empirical investigation of well-being determinants, integrating normative and descriptive inquiry in ways characteristic of critical social theory.

The analysis proceeds through several stages. First, we elaborate on the *LebensFormen* conceptual framework as developed by Jaeggi, explicating its philosophical foundations in Wittgenstein while emphasizing Jaeggi's critical theoretical transformation. Second, we integrate Honneth's recognition theory and Rosa's resonance concept as complementary frameworks for organizational analysis. Third, we examine connections between organizational sustainability and human well-being, critiquing limited sustainability conceptualizations while developing richer alternatives informed by critical theory. Fourth, we analyse happiness research and POS through critical lenses, identifying organizational conditions enabling flourishing. Fifth, we investigate tensions between technological transformation and human flourishing, examining how DTs reconfigure organizational forms of life with ambiguous implications for recognition and resonance. Sixth, we propose design principles for flourishing-oriented organizations integrating sustainability commitments with happiness promotion. Finally, we address implementation challenges, power dynamics, and future research directions.

8.2 LebensFormen: From Wittgensteinian Foundations to Jaeggian Critical Theory

8.2.1 Wittgensteinian Origins: Forms of Life as Background Practices

The concept of *Lebensform* emerged in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), marking a decisive shift from his earlier *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* towards a conception of language as socially embedded practice rather than an abstract logical structure mirroring reality. Wittgenstein employed *Lebensform* to denote the background of shared practices, agreements in judgements, and ways of acting that render language meaningful and communication possible. He famously observed: "What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life" (§226, p. 226e). This cryptic formulation suggests that *LebensFormen* constitute bedrock – foundational patterns of human existence that enable but cannot themselves be reduced to more fundamental explanatory principles.

Several key characteristics define Wittgensteinian *LebensFormen*:

Social embeddedness and collective practices: Forms of life are irreducibly social rather than individual phenomena. They encompass collective patterns of activity, shared linguistic practices, and common reactions that enable mutual understanding and co-ordinated action. Individuals are always already situated within *LebensFormen* that preceded and enabled

their particular actions, utterances, and self-understandings. This social character challenges individualistic ontologies treating isolated subjects as fundamental units, emphasizing the constitutive role of social practices in shaping subjectivity itself instead. For Wittgenstein, understanding another person's utterance or action requires grasping the form of life within which it gains meaning – the broader context of practices, purposes, and normative commitments that render behaviours intelligible (Wittgenstein, 1953, §23).

Practice orientation and rule-following: *LebensFormen* centre on what people *do* rather than merely what they think, believe, or represent mentally. Wittgenstein emphasized that meaning derives from use in practice rather than correspondence to mental representations or external reality. Understanding a form of life requires grasping the practical activities and rule-following behaviours that constitute it, though "following a rule" itself proves to be a practice embedded in customs and institutions rather than a mental process of interpretation (Wittgenstein, 1953, §§185–242). This practice orientation anticipates contemporary practice theory traditions in organizational studies emphasizing routines, habits, and embodied know-how over cognitive representations or formal structures (Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki et al., 2001).

Normative structure and correctness standards: Forms of life incorporate normative dimensions, standards of correctness, appropriateness, and intelligibility that distinguish legitimate from illegitimate performances. These norms are not externally imposed rules but are internal to the practices themselves, learnt through participation and manifest in competent performance. The normative character of *LebensFormen* means they shape not only what people do but also what they ought to do within particular contexts. Wittgenstein's famous private language argument demonstrates that even seemingly private mental states acquire meaning only through public criteria embedded in shared forms of life (Wittgenstein, 1953, §§243–315).

Background character and taken-for-grantedness: Forms of life function as taken-for-granted backgrounds against which actions and utterances become meaningful. They constitute what Wittgenstein later called "hinge" propositions or practices so foundational that they are presupposed rather than questioned in ordinary activities (Wittgenstein, 1969). This background character means *LebensFormen* often remain invisible to participants, becoming apparent only when disrupted or when encountering alternative forms of life. The background quality of *LebensFormen* raises important questions about reflexivity, criticism, and transformation that Wittgenstein himself did not adequately address.

Plurality without common foundation: Wittgenstein acknowledged multiple *LebensFormen* without presuming a universal human essence or shared

rational foundation transcending particular forms. Different communities may embody different forms of life exhibiting partial incommensurability, lacking common standards enabling neutral adjudication between them. This pluralism, while avoiding ethnocentric universalism, raises difficult questions about cross-cultural understanding, moral disagreement, and the possibility of critique from external standpoints that Wittgenstein's philosophy left largely unresolved.

The Wittgensteinian account of *LebensFormen*, while philosophically rich and influential, exhibits certain limitations when applied to social criticism and organizational analysis:

Conservatism and givenness: Wittgenstein's insistence that forms of life must be "accepted" as "the given" suggests a quietist or conservative stance that forecloses critical questioning of existing arrangements. If forms of life constitute bedrock beyond which we cannot go, on what basis might we criticize or transform them? This apparent conservatism has troubled many commentators and limited the concept's critical potential (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 1–6).

Insufficient attention to power, domination, and ideology: Wittgenstein's account abstracts from power relations, material conditions, and ideological distortions that may shape forms of life in ways systematically benefiting some participants while oppressing others. His emphasis on agreement and shared practices risks naturalizing power asymmetries as mere aspects of particular forms of life rather than recognizing them as potential pathologies requiring criticism and transformation (Fraser, 1989).

Neglect of historical development and transformation: Wittgenstein provides limited resources for understanding how forms of life emerge historically, undergo transformation, or exhibit internal contradictions generating pressures for change. His synchronic, snapshot-like approach captures forms of life at particular moments but offers little account of their diachronic development or crisis tendencies (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 48–51).

Unclear criteria for evaluation: While Wittgenstein's account implies some forms of life function better than others (enabling communication, co-ordination, and meaningful activity), he provides no explicit criteria for distinguishing successful from failed, rational from irrational, or emancipatory from oppressive forms of life. This evaluative deficit limits the concept's normative utility for social criticism (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 6–10).

These limitations motivate Rahel Jaeggi's critical theoretical transformation of the *LebensFormen* concept, which preserves Wittgenstein's insights while

developing resources for criticism, transformation, and normative evaluation absent from the original formulation.

8.2.2 Jaeggi's Critical Theory of Forms of Life: Immanent Critique and Problem-Solving

Rahel Jaeggi's *Critique of Forms of Life* (2018) represents a systematic philosophical effort to rehabilitate the *LebensFormen* concept for critical social theory while addressing the limitations inherent in both Wittgensteinian descriptivism and communitarian conservatism. Jaeggi develops an account of forms of life as dynamic problem-solving ensembles subject to immanent critique – a form of criticism that works from within forms of life themselves rather than imposing external normative standards. Her framework provides powerful resources for organizational analysis by enabling critical evaluation of organizational arrangements without relying on ahistorical universalist principles or capitulating to relativistic acceptance of whatever exists.

Forms of life as bundles of social practices: Jaeggi conceptualizes forms of life as "bundles of social practices" (2018, p. 47) that hang together in more or less coherent ways, constituting frameworks for action, interpretation, and normative orientation. Following Wittgenstein, she emphasizes their practical, habitual, and taken-for-granted character. However, Jaeggi stresses that forms of life are not only collections of discrete practices but also structured wholes exhibiting internal relations, mutual dependencies, and organizing principles. Forms of life provide comprehensive orientations structuring multiple life domains – work, family, politics, consumption, leisure – in mutually reinforcing or contradictory ways.

Applied to organizations, this suggests understanding organizational forms of life as comprehensive systems integrating work practices, authority relations, temporal structures, spatial arrangements, linguistic conventions, evaluative frameworks, and material conditions into more or less coherent wholes. An organizational form of life encompasses not just formal structures or explicit policies but the tacit understandings, habitual practices, and normative assumptions structuring organizational existence. For instance, the organizational form of life instantiated by traditional Fordist manufacturing differs fundamentally from that of contemporary platform companies – not only in specific practices but also in comprehensive orientation towards time, space, authority, and human potentiality.

Historical development and transformation: Crucially, Jaeggi emphasizes that forms of life exhibit historical character – they emerge through historical processes, undergo transformation, and potentially dissolve or be replaced. Forms of life are not timeless givens but historical accomplishments resulting from previous struggles, experiments, and problem-solving efforts.

This historical perspective enables understanding organizational forms as products of specific historical conditions – technological capabilities, market structures, labour relations, regulatory regimes, and cultural values – that may change, generating pressures for organizational transformation.

For instance, the bureaucratic organizational form that Weber (1978) analysed emerged in specific historical circumstances – industrialization, state centralization, literacy expansion, and rationalization processes – and exhibited functional advantages under those conditions. Contemporary transformations – digitalization, globalization, knowledge economy emergence, and value changes – may render bureaucratic forms increasingly dysfunctional, generating pressures towards new organizational forms (post-bureaucratic, networked, and platform-based). Understanding these dynamics requires historical analysis examining how forms of life emerge, stabilize, enter crisis, and undergo transformation (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 48–79).

Problem-solving character and functional analysis: Jaeggi argues that forms of life should be understood as attempts to solve practical problems confronting human communities. Forms of life respond to challenges including material reproduction, social co-ordination, conflict resolution, meaning-making, and normative orientation. They represent collective experiments in organizing common life to address these perennial problems under specific historical conditions. This problem-solving character provides a basis for evaluating forms of life: Successful forms effectively address the problems motivating them; failed forms systematically fail to solve problems they themselves generate or promise to address (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 242–293).

Applied organizationally, this suggests evaluating organizational forms by examining whether they successfully address the problems they ostensibly exist to solve. Organizations typically justify themselves through explicit purposes – producing goods, providing services, generating profits, employing workers, and serving stakeholders. Immanent critique examines whether organizational arrangements actually achieve these purposes or whether they systematically frustrate them. For instance, organizations claiming to value employee well-being while implementing management practices generating burn-out and turnover exhibit internal contradictions between explicit purposes and actual functioning. Such contradictions provide critical leverage for transformation demands grounded in the organization's own professed commitments rather than external impositions.

Moreover, organizations generate new problems requiring solutions. Tayloristic work organization solved co-ordination problems in early industrial production but generated new problems – worker alienation, motivation deficits, knowledge under-utilization, and those subsequent organizational innovations (human relations, quality circles, and team-based production) attempted to address. This problem-generating and problem-solving dynamic constitutes organizational forms as evolving rather than static, with

each "solution" potentially generating new challenges requiring further innovation.

Immanent critique and internal contradictions: Jaeggi develops a sophisticated account of immanent critique – criticism working from within forms of life rather than applying external standards. Immanent critique identifies contradictions among (1) explicit purposes and actual functioning; (2) different constitutive elements within forms of life; (3) forms of life and the conditions enabling their reproduction; and (4) forms of life and participants' needs, interests, or aspirations. These internal contradictions provide critical leverage because they reveal failures by forms of life's own standards rather than imposing alien criteria (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 294–360).

For organizational analysis, immanent critique examines multiple contradiction types:

Purpose–performance contradictions: Organizations professing particular values (innovation, sustainability, and diversity) while implementing practices undermining those values (risk aversion, short-termism, and homogeneity) exhibit contradictions between stated purposes and actual functioning. These contradictions enable critique grounded in organization's own commitments: "You claim to value X, yet your practices systematically prevent X."

Internal incoherence: Organizational practices may contradict one another – performance management systems reward individual achievement, while organizational rhetoric emphasizes teamwork; flexibility rhetoric while implementing rigid monitoring. Such internal incoherence generates confusion, cynicism, and dysfunction while providing a critical perspective: "Your practices contradict one another, preventing coherent orientation."

Reproductive contradictions: Organizations may undermine their own reproduction conditions – depleting employee health through overwork, destroying environmental conditions enabling operations, or eroding social trust necessary for legitimacy. These reproductive contradictions reveal unsustainability: "Your practices destroy the conditions making them possible."

Participant alienation: When organizational arrangements systematically frustrate participant needs, aspirations, or capacities for self-realization, they generate alienation – a form of failed form of life. Participants experience organizational demands as external impositions alien to authentic self-expression rather than frameworks enabling flourishing. This alienation signals pathology: "This form of life systematically prevents rather than enables human flourishing."

Pathological forms of life: Jaeggi introduces the concept of "pathological" or "failed" forms of life – comprehensive failures in problem-solving or

self-reproduction generating systematic suffering, dysfunction, or crisis (2018, pp. 361–403). Pathologies are not mere suboptimal arrangements but deep structural failures requiring fundamental transformation rather than incremental adjustment. Identifying pathologies requires examining whether forms of life:

1. Systematically fail to achieve their own purposes: Organizations claiming efficiency while generating waste and dysfunction, claiming innovation while stifling creativity, and claiming care for employees while causing harm.
2. Generate self-undermining dynamics: Organizations whose practices erode preconditions for their own continuation – unsustainable resource consumption, talent depletion through burn-out, and legitimacy loss through scandal.
3. Produce systematic alienation: Organizations preventing rather than enabling participants' self-realization, treating humans as mere means rather than ends, or reducing persons to functional roles, denying full humanity.
4. Exhibit totalizing character: Organizations colonizing all life domains, preventing outside perspectives, or demanding complete identification, foreclosing the critical distance necessary for authentic subjectivity.
5. Resist learning and adaptation: Organizations unable to recognize or respond to problems, exhibiting rigid defensiveness against criticism or an inability to learn from failures.

Applied to contemporary organizations, this pathology concept enables identifying deeply problematic arrangements: platform companies whose business models depend on exploiting precarious workers' desperation; financial institutions whose profit logics generate systemic risks; technology companies whose engagement optimization produces addictive, harmful user behaviours; and corporations whose environmental practices guarantee ecological catastrophe. These represent not only unethical practices but also failed forms of life requiring fundamental reconstruction rather than reform.

Transformation and emancipatory potential: Crucially, Jaeggi emphasizes that forms of life are not immutable but subject to transformation through social struggle, innovation, and learning. Identifying contradictions and pathologies provides impetus for transformation efforts. Emancipatory transformation involves imposing not utopian blueprints but experimental problem-solving addressing identified failures while remaining open to emergent possibilities. Transformation requires both critique identifying pathologies and creative imagination envisioning alternative arrangements (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 404–450).

For organizations, this suggests that critical analysis should culminate not merely in negative critique but constructive proposals for alternative organizational forms addressing identified pathologies. If existing organizational forms generate burn-out through excessive demands and inadequate recovery, alternatives might involve workload limits, mandatory disconnection periods, or redesigned processes reducing the frenetic pace. If existing forms generate meaninglessness through fragmentation and instrumentalization, alternatives might involve job enrichment, participatory governance, or purpose clarification. Transformation requires both imagination – envisioning alternatives – and experimentation – testing whether alternatives actually solve problems more successfully than existing arrangements.

8.2.3 Recognition Theory: Honneth's Framework for Organizational Analysis

Axel Honneth's recognition theory provides complementary critical resources for organizational analysis, illuminating how intersubjective recognition constitutes subjectivity while its systematic denial generates pathology and injustice. Honneth argues that human identity and agency emerge through recognition relationships in which others acknowledge and confirm our distinctive characteristics, capacities, and worth (Honneth, 1995). Recognition is not merely psychological affirmation but constitutive of selfhood itself – we become subjects capable of self-relation and autonomous action only through others' recognition.

Three spheres of recognition: Honneth distinguishes three fundamental recognition spheres, each enabling distinctive forms of self-relation:

Love and intimate recognition: In intimate relationships (family, friendship, and romantic partnership), individuals experience recognition as unique, irreplaceable people worthy of care and concern for their own sake. This emotional recognition enables self-confidence – basic trust in one's own needs, desires, and bodily integrity. Organizations have a limited direct role in intimate recognition but profoundly affect it by structuring the temporal and energetic resources available for intimate relationships. Work arrangements demanding such extensive time and energy that intimate relationships become impossible or impoverished undermine this recognition sphere (Honneth, 1995, pp. 95–107).

Rights and legal recognition: In legal–political spheres, individuals experience recognition as bearers of equal rights deserving respect as autonomous people capable of rational self-determination. Legal recognition transcends particularistic care to acknowledge universal personhood, enabling self-respect – confidence in one's status as a rights-bearing member

of a moral community. Organizations participate in legal recognition by respecting employee rights, providing due process, and treating members as persons rather than mere instruments. Organizations denying voice, imposing arbitrary authority, or violating rights undermine legal recognition (Honneth, 1995, pp. 107–120).

Achievement and social esteem: In spheres of work and citizenship, individuals experience recognition for distinctive contributions, capabilities, and achievements within shared projects. Social esteem acknowledges particular qualities making one a valuable community member, enabling self-esteem – confidence in abilities and activities' worth. Organizations constitute primary contexts for achievement recognition, making them crucial for this recognition dimension. Organizations providing opportunities for meaningful contribution, acknowledging achievements, and validating distinctive capabilities enable social esteem; those treating members as interchangeable, denying recognition, or devaluing contributions undermine it (Honneth, 1995, pp. 121–139).

Misrecognition and disrespect: Honneth emphasizes that recognition's denial or distortion – misrecognition – generates specific forms of psychological and moral harm. Three misrecognition types correspond to recognition spheres:

1. Abuse and violation: Physical or psychological abuse denying bodily integrity and emotional need legitimacy undermines self-confidence. Organizational contexts involve harassment, violence, excessive surveillance, or degrading treatment.
2. Rights denial and exclusion: Denying rights, excluding from equal participation, or treating as inferior rational capacities undermines self-respect. Organizational manifestations include discrimination, voice denial, arbitrary authority, or second-class status.
3. Denigration and invisibility: Devaluing contributions, denying distinctive worth, or rendering invisible one's activities undermines self-esteem. Organizations manifest this through ignoring achievements, attributing success to others, or treating work as valueless.

These misrecognition forms generate not only subjective dissatisfaction but also objective injustice requiring rectification. Recognition theory thus provides a normative framework for evaluating organizational arrangements: Just organizations enable recognition across all three spheres; unjust organizations systematically deny recognition or distribute it unequally based on morally arbitrary characteristics (Honneth, 1995, pp. 131–139).

Social freedom and institutional recognition: In later work, Honneth (2014) develops the concept of "social freedom" – freedom realized through

mutual recognition in institutional spheres, enabling reciprocal need satisfaction. Social freedom contrasts with negative freedom (absence of interference) and reflexive freedom (rational self-legislation). Social freedom emerges when an institution's structure interacts such that pursuing one's purposes simultaneously enables others' purpose pursuit through complementary role structures. Well-functioning markets (ideally), democratic states, and intimate relationships exemplify social freedom when structured by mutual recognition.

Applied to organizations, social freedom requires institutional arrangements where members' self-realization mutually enables rather than conflicts. This contrasts with zero-sum arrangements where some members' flourishing requires others' subordination or sacrifice. Organizations enabling social freedom would structure roles such that each member's contribution, development, and recognition complement others' development. This suggests organizational designs emphasizing:

Complementarity over subordination: Role structures where members perform different but equally necessary functions, each requiring distinctive excellence recognized as valuable. This contrasts with hierarchies treating lower positions as merely instrumental to upper positions' purposes.

Reciprocity over exploitation: Employment relationships where both employers and employees benefit through fair exchange rather than extractive relationships where one party systematically captures value created by another.

Collective purpose orientation: Shared purposes towards which members' distinct contributions orient, enabling recognition of diverse contributions as valuable within a larger project. This provides a framework for mutual appreciation transcending individual interest.

Democratic participation: Voice and participation rights enabling members to shape institutional arrangements rather than merely conforming to externally imposed structures. Participation realizes freedom as self-legislation within shared contexts (Honneth, 2014, pp. 111–193).

Reification and recognition pathologies: Honneth's concept of "reification" – treating persons or social relations as things – illuminates organizational pathologies. Reification occurs when recognition relations underlying social practices become forgotten or denied, with humans treated as objects subject to manipulation rather than subjects deserving recognition (Honneth, 2008). Organizational reification manifests in:

Objectifying HRM: Treating employees as "human capital" or "resources" to be optimally deployed, quantified, and measured reduces persons to instrumentally valuable things. This linguistic framing reflects and reinforces reifying attitudes.

Algorithmic management: Automated systems directing human activity through algorithmic instructions without recognition of human judgement, agency, or distinctive capabilities treat workers as programmable elements within technical systems (Kellogg et al., 2020).

Metric fixation: Reducing complex human activities to quantified performance metrics treats people as measurement outputs rather than recognizing qualitative dimensions of meaningful work (Muller, 2018).

Disposability: Treating employees as easily replaceable – through precarious employment, zero-hour contracts, or at-will termination – denies recognition of distinctive capabilities and contributions, suggesting interchangeability.

These reifying practices represent recognition pathologies requiring criticism and transformation. Organizations should instead cultivate recognition practices acknowledging members' subjectivity, distinctive capabilities, and irreducible worth beyond instrumental value.

8.2.4 Resonance and Alienation: Rosa's Contribution to Organizational Analysis

Hartmut Rosa's social acceleration theory and resonance concept provide additional critical resources for examining organizational life quality. Rosa (2013, 2019) argues that contemporary society's defining feature is acceleration across three dimensions: technological acceleration (faster processes), social acceleration (faster life tempo and situational change), and acceleration of the pace of life (more episodes per time unit). This triple acceleration generates systematic temporal scarcity, the paradox that time-saving technologies produce experienced time poverty rather than leisure expansion, and fundamentally transforms human–world relationships.

Alienation through acceleration: Rosa argues that acceleration generates alienation – experienced disconnection from the world, self, and others. When life accelerates beyond certain thresholds, individuals lose capacity for sustained attention, deep engagement, and meaningful relationship formation. Relationships with things, practices, people, and oneself become instrumental and superficial rather than substantive and meaningful. Contemporary life increasingly exhibits "frenetic standstill" – intense activity producing no meaningful progress or transformation, like running ever faster to remain in place (Rosa, 2013, pp. 206–287).

Applied to organizations, acceleration theory illuminates how contemporary work intensification, multitasking demands, constant connectivity, and perpetual change generate alienation. Employees describe feeling overwhelmed, fragmented, and unable to engage meaningfully with work when demands permit only superficial, hurried attention. Organizations accelerate through:

Process acceleration: Faster production cycles, shortened development timelines, compressed project schedules, and expectations for immediate responsiveness. DTs not only enable but also demand an accelerated pace, with email response expectations measured in hours rather than days.
Innovation acceleration: Shortened product life cycles, continuous organizational restructuring, perpetual change initiatives, and constant skill obsolescence. Employees barely master one system before confronting another, preventing stable competence development.
Communication acceleration: Information overload, meeting proliferation, simultaneous communication channel management, and expectations for constant availability. Acceleration prevents reflective thought or sustained focus.

These acceleration dynamics generate temporal structures inimical to flourishing, preventing the sustained engagement, contemplation, and relationship depth that meaningful work requires. Alienation results from the impossibility of forming resonant relationships with work when it becomes a mere means to external ends or when pace prevents genuine engagement (Rosa, 2013, pp. 261–287).

Resonance as a good life criterion: Rosa (2019) develops "resonance" as a phenomenological criterion for a good life, transcending both subjective satisfaction (which may reflect adaptive preferences) and objective list approaches (which may impose external standards). Resonance describes a responsive relationship quality where subjects experience themselves as affecting and being affected by the world in meaningful ways. Resonant relationships exhibit four characteristics:

1. Affection (Berührung): Subjects feel genuinely moved, touched, or addressed by what they encounter, experiencing it as meaningful rather than indifferent.
2. Self-efficacy (Selbstwirksamkeit): Subjects experience the capacity to affect or transform what they encounter, feeling agency rather than powerlessness.
3. Transformation: Encounters genuinely alter subjects and the encountered world rather than leaving both unchanged, enabling growth and development.
4. Uncontrollability: Resonant encounters cannot be completely controlled or instrumentalized; they retain an element of surprise, spontaneity, or gift character transcending pure technique.

Resonance contrasts with alienation, characterized by indifference (nothing moves one), powerlessness (nothing responds to efforts), rigidity (everything remains unchanged), and reification (everything becomes a mere

object of manipulation). Alienation represents the absence of a responsive relationship with the world, self, or others (Rosa, 2019, pp. 174–241).

Applied organizationally, resonance provides a phenomenological criterion for evaluating work quality. Good organizational forms enable resonant work relationships where:

Work feels meaningful and affecting: Tasks genuinely engage attention and interest rather than feeling arbitrary or pointless. Workers experience work as addressing them, calling forth their capabilities, and mattering beyond mere survival necessity.

Workers experience efficacy: Effort produces visible effects; workers see results of their labour and experience the capacity to shape outcomes. This contrasts with bureaucratic powerlessness, where effort disappears into opaque systems producing no visible effect.

Work enables transformation: Engaging work transforms both the worker (developing capabilities and gaining understanding) and the work world (producing valuable outcomes). This mutual transformation constitutes growth rather than mere repetition.

Work retains spontaneous moments: Beyond routinization and control, work includes elements of creativity, surprise, or discovery that cannot be completely programmed. Complete rationalization destroys resonance by eliminating uncontrollable elements necessary for genuine responsiveness.

Resonance axes in organizational life: Rosa identifies three primary "resonance axes" – domains where resonant or alienated relationships form:

1. Material resonance: Relationships with things, tools, nature, and physical environments. Craft work enabling deep engagement with materials, sustainable practices fostering connection with nature, or aesthetic workplace design supporting sensory engagement exemplify material resonance. Alienation manifests in purely instrumental thing relationships, treating materials as mere means.
2. Social resonance: Relationships with other persons. Collaborative work enabling genuine mutual recognition, supportive relationships providing care, or participatory governance enabling collective agency exemplify social resonance. Alienation manifests in instrumental, competitive, or impersonal social relations.
3. Existential resonance: Relationships with comprehensive meaning frameworks, purposes, or transcendent commitments. Work connected to valued purposes, vocational callings providing identity, or organizational missions addressing fundamental human concerns exemplify existential resonance. Alienation manifests in meaninglessness, purposelessness, or a value vacuum.

Organizations enabling resonance across all three axes – providing engaging material work, supportive social relationships, and meaningful purposes – cultivate flourishing. Organizations generating alienation across these axes – through instrumental thing relationships, impersonal social structures, and meaningless purposes – produce suffering regardless of material compensation or external success metrics (Rosa, 2019, pp. 298–362).

Organizational responses to acceleration and alienation: Rosa's framework suggests that addressing contemporary organizational pathologies requires confronting acceleration dynamics rather than merely adjusting organizational practices within accelerated frameworks. This might involve:

Deceleration practices: Deliberately slowing certain processes to enable deeper engagement – slower decision-making allowing genuine deliberation, extended project timelines permitting quality work, or scheduled reflection periods enabling learning from experience. Deceleration contradicts dominant acceleration imperatives but may prove essential for resonance.

Temporal sovereignty: Enabling workers to exercise greater control over work tempo and scheduling rather than subjecting them to externally imposed rhythms. This might include flexible arrangements, elimination of constant monitoring, or protection from after-hours intrusions enabling recovery.

Stability islands: Creating zones of relative stability amid perpetual change – core processes, relationships, or purposes maintained over time rather than constant disruption. Stability provides grounding, enabling meaningful engagement rather than disorienting flux.

Quality over quantity orientation: Evaluating work by quality, meaning, or value rather than quantity, speed, or volume. This requires resisting metric reductionism and cultivating judgement capable of appreciating qualitative dimensions irreducible to measurement.

8.3 Organizational Forms of Life: Characteristics, Variations, and Pathologies

8.3.1 Dimensions of Organizational LebensFormen

Drawing on Jaeggi's framework, organizational forms of life can be analysed across multiple constitutive dimensions that collectively structure the lived experience of organizational membership. These dimensions exhibit internal relations – changes in one dimension typically affect others – while particular configurations create distinctive organizational *LebensFormen* with varying implications for human flourishing.

Temporal structuring and acceleration dynamics: Organizations impose particular temporal orders – rhythms of activity, scheduling conventions, deadline structures, and temporal horizons that fundamentally shape experience and possibility. The temporal dimension proves particularly consequential because it structures attention allocation, relationship formation possibilities, and meaning-making capacities. Following Rosa's analysis, contemporary organizations increasingly exhibit pathological acceleration, producing chronic time scarcity and frenetic standstill.

Traditional bureaucratic organizations exhibited relatively stable temporal structures: standard work hours (nine-to-five), predictable career progressions (hierarchical advancement over decades), and extended project cycles (multi-year planning horizons). These temporal structures enabled certain forms of life – stable family arrangements co-ordinated around predictable schedules, long-term skill development within particular domains, sustained attention to complex problems – while constraining others. Temporal regularity provided not only security and predictability but also rigidity and potential monotony (Rosa, 2013, pp. 151–205).

Contemporary organizational temporal structures increasingly diverge from bureaucratic patterns through multiple acceleration mechanisms:

Intensification and densification: Work tempo accelerates through multitasking demands, meeting proliferation, compressed deadlines, and expectations for immediate responsiveness. Workers describe experiencing constant pressure, insufficient time for thoughtful work, and a perpetual sense of running behind. Time becomes a scarce commodity requiring aggressive management, paradoxically intensifying experienced scarcity through management efforts themselves.

Boundary erosion: Digital connectivity enables and increasingly demands work outside traditional temporal boundaries. Email, messaging platforms, and mobile devices make workers perpetually accessible, eroding distinctions between work time and personal time. Organizations increasingly expect or pressure workers to respond during evenings, weekends, and vacations, generating "techno-invasion" and preventing recovery necessary for health and well-being (Derks & Bakker, 2014).

Flexibility demands: Contemporary organizations demand temporal flexibility – workers adapting schedules to organizational needs through on-call availability, variable hours, or compressed deadlines. While "flexibility" rhetoric suggests employee autonomy, actual flexibility often flows unidirectionally – organizations gaining scheduling flexibility while workers lose temporal predictability necessary for co-ordinating non-work commitments. This asymmetric flexibility particularly burdens workers with care responsibilities (Lambert, 2008).

Perpetual change: Organizational restructurings, strategy shifts, technology implementations, and process redesigns occur with increasing frequency, preventing stable adaptation. Workers barely adjust to one configuration before confronting another, generating continuous learning demands, and preventing mastery. This perpetual change exhibits Rosa's "frenetic standstill" – intense activity producing no stable accomplishment or genuine development (Rosa, 2013, pp. 261–287).

Short-termism: Organizational temporal horizons shorten as financial markets demand quarterly performance, product cycles compress, and career tenure declines. Short temporal horizons undermine long-term investments in relationships, capabilities, or innovations requiring extended development periods. Organizations and workers alike become trapped in presentism, unable to pursue projects requiring sustained commitment over years or decades (Sennett, 1998).

These temporal pathologies generate distinctive alienation forms. When work pace prevents sustained attention, workers cannot form resonant relationships with activities, experiencing them as mere items on task lists rather than meaningful engagements. When perpetual change prevents stability, workers cannot develop deep competence or lasting relationships, experiencing organizational life as disorienting flux. When short-termism dominates, workers cannot pursue meaningful long-term projects or see their efforts come to fruition, experiencing futility. From a *LebensFormen* perspective, these temporal structures represent failed forms generating problems they cannot solve – productivity systems that exhaust workers, innovation imperatives that prevent genuine creativity, and flexibility regimes that rigidify through very flexibility demands.

Spatial arrangements and embodied presence: Organizations structure space through office layouts, territorial demarcations, movement patterns, and geographic distributions, fundamentally shaping interaction possibilities, privacy, status signalling, and embodied experience. Spatial arrangements constitute not merely containers for activity but constitutive dimensions of organizational forms of life-shaping recognition patterns, resonance possibilities, and power relations.

Traditional bureaucratic spatial forms featured hierarchical arrangements materializing power relations: executive offices on upper floors with windows and square footage proportional to rank; clerical workers in open pools enabling surveillance; physical proximity correlating with organizational intimacy and information access. These spatial forms simultaneously enabled co-ordination through physical co-presence while inscribing inequality through differential spatial privilege. The office building itself symbolized organizational permanence and stability, providing a material anchor for organizational identity (Dale & Burrell, 2008).

Contemporary organizational spatial forms exhibit greater diversity, reflecting varying organizational purposes and power relations:

Open-plan offices: Dominant in many contemporary organizations, open plans eliminate enclosed private offices in favour of shared spaces, purportedly enhancing collaboration, communication, and egalitarianism. However, research reveals ambiguous effects: While physical barriers decrease, sonic barriers (noise) and psychological barriers (lack of privacy) may actually reduce quality interaction. Workers report difficulty concentrating, sensory overload, and inability to conduct confidential conversations. Open plans often reflect cost minimization rather than genuine commitment to collaboration, while status hierarchies persist through desk location, furniture quality, or meeting room access (Bernstein & Turban, 2018).

Hot-desking and activity-based work: Some organizations eliminate assigned workspaces, requiring workers to reserve desks daily or work from various spaces suited to activities. Proponents argue that this increases utilization efficiency and work flexibility. Critics note loss of personalization, territorial insecurity, and daily workspace hunting as stressors. From a recognition perspective, eliminating personal workspace denies workers spatial recognition – physical location signifying organizational belonging and enabling identity expression through personalization (Kingma, 2019).

Remote and hybrid arrangements: Pandemic-accelerated remote work represents a profound spatial transformation, with organizational activity occurring across distributed domestic spaces rather than centralized offices. Remote work enables autonomy, eliminates commuting, and allows geographic flexibility while potentially generating isolation, boundary problems (work invading home), and reduced social capital formation. Hybrid arrangements combining remote and office work create complex spatial dynamics requiring continual negotiation (Putnam et al., 2014).

Surveillance architectures: Contemporary organizations increasingly embed surveillance technologies – cameras, sensors, productivity monitoring software, and location tracking – into spatial arrangements, transforming workspaces into sites of continuous observation. Surveillance represents spatial recognition pathology, treating workers as objects requiring control rather than subjects deserving privacy and autonomy. The spatial experience shifts from place-as-possibility to place-as-constraint, with every location potentially monitored (Zuboff, 2019).

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, spatial arrangements should enable both solitary concentration and collaborative interaction, provide privacy when

needed and social connection when desired, materialize respect rather than surveillance, and offer environments supporting diverse work modes. Pathological spatial forms either/or rather than both/and – forcing collaboration while preventing concentration, demanding presence while providing inadequate space, or constantly surveilling while proclaiming trust.

Role structures and identity constitution: Organizations define roles – positions within the division of labour with associated responsibilities, authorities, expectations, and identities. Roles profoundly shape subjectivity because they provide frameworks for self-understanding, sources of social recognition, and structures for meaningful contribution. Following Honneth, roles can enable recognition by acknowledging distinctive capabilities and contributions or generate misrecognition through subordination, invisibility, or degradation.

Jaeggi emphasizes that forms of life incorporate identity structures – ways of being a person that particular arrangements enable or foreclose. Organizational roles similarly constitute identity possibilities: "manager," "professional," "worker," "entrepreneur," "colleague," and "expert" – these role categories provide not only functional positions but also subject positions shaping self-understanding and social recognition. Organizational *LebensFormen* vary in role rigidity versus fluidity, role clarity versus ambiguity, role multiplicity versus singularity, and opportunities for role transcendence versus entrapment.

Professional roles and vocational identity: Many organizational roles connect to broader professional identities, transcending employers – physician, engineer, teacher, and craftsperson. Professional roles typically involve extended training, specialized knowledge, ethical commitments, and collegial communities, providing strong identity foundations and intrinsic work motivations. Organizations employing professionals must negotiate between organizational control imperatives and professional autonomy claims. When organizations respect professional identities, enable autonomous judgement, and provide resources for excellent practice, they enable recognition and resonance. When organizations subordinate professional judgement to administrative dictates, constrain resources preventing quality work, or demand compromises violating professional ethics, they generate alienation and moral injury (Freidson, 2001).

Managerial and leadership roles: Managerial roles occupy positions in organizational recognition orders – simultaneously receiving recognition from subordinates and superiors while mediating between them. Managers ideally enable subordinates' recognition by acknowledging achievements, supporting development, and advocating for resources, while translating organizational demands into achievable expectations. However, managerial roles also embed power asymmetries, potentially enabling misrecognition through arbitrary authority, favouritism, or abuse. Pathological management

treats subordinates as mere instruments, denies their distinctive capabilities, or exercises power arbitrarily without accountability (Hales, 1986).

Precarious and stigmatized roles: Many organizational roles involve precarious employment (temporary contracts, zero-hours arrangements, and gig work) or stigmatized status (dirty work, low-skill designation, and subordinated positions). These roles generate distinctive recognition deficits: Precarity denies temporal recognition (commitment to the worker's future), while stigma denies qualitative recognition (social esteem for contribution). Workers in precarious or stigmatized roles experience organizational membership as contingent, partial, or degraded rather than secure and esteemed. This recognition deprivation represents injustice requiring rectification through stable employment, fair compensation, and dignified treatment (Kalleberg, 2011).

Role multiplicity and conflict: Individuals simultaneously occupy multiple roles – organizational roles, family roles, civic roles, and personal identities – potentially generating enrichment through diverse engagement or conflict through incompatible demands. Organizations structuring work such that professional demands systematically conflict with family responsibilities, civic participation, or personal development impose forced choices between important identities. This generates what Honneth calls "social pathology" – structural arrangements making it impossible to fulfil legitimate role expectations simultaneously. Family-supportive organizational policies, reasonable workload limits, and respect for non-work identities reduce role conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, organizational role structures should enable rather than frustrate identity formation, provide recognition rather than misrecognition, allow integration rather than fragmentation of multiple identities, and offer development rather than stagnation. Pathological role structures treat people as merely role occupants rather than complex subjects, deny recognition for contributions, force impossible role conflicts, or trap individuals in stagnant positions without development pathways.

Purposive orientations and meaning structures: Organizations embody purposes, missions, or *telos*, providing directional orientation and meaning frameworks. Following Jaeggi, forms of life exhibit purposive character – they orient towards goods, problems, or aspirations that structure activities and provide evaluative frameworks. Organizational purposes similarly structure what activities count as meaningful, what achievements deserve recognition, and what futures deserve pursuit.

Purpose proves particularly consequential for flourishing because humans require meaningful activity – activity connected to purposes they find valuable and contributing to outcomes they consider worthwhile. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy emphasizes that meaning represents a fundamental human need, with meaning deficits generating an existential vacuum and psychological

suffering (Frankl, 2006). Organizations providing meaningful purposes enable existential resonance; those lacking defensible purposes or oriented towards purposes experienced as alienating generate meaninglessness.

Explicit purpose statements: Organizations typically articulate explicit missions or purpose statements – producing quality products, serving customers, generating returns, advancing knowledge, providing employment, and serving communities. These explicit purposes represent organizations' self-understanding and public justification. Immanent critique examines whether organizational practices actually pursue stated purposes or contradict them. When organizations profess customer service while implementing policies degrading service, claim employee care while generating burn-out, or announce environmental commitment while polluting, they exhibit purpose–performance contradictions generating cynicism and alienation (Ocasio et al., 2017).

Implicit purposes and functional realities: Beyond explicit statements, organizations exhibit implicit purposes revealed through actual practice – what they systematically reward, resource, and accomplish. Implicit purposes may contradict explicit ones: organizations claiming innovation while punishing risk-taking, professing quality while rewarding speed, or announcing stakeholder orientation while exclusively serving shareholders. These contradictions reveal misalignment between professed identity and actual functioning, providing critical leverage: "Your actions reveal different purposes than your words proclaim" (Brunsson, 1989).

Purpose defensibility and moral worth: Not all purposes equally deserve pursuit or generate meaning. Following Jaeggi, forms of life prove more or less defensible depending on whether they successfully solve problems they address and whether those problems themselves deserve a solution. Some organizational purposes – providing needed goods, developing capabilities, advancing knowledge, and serving communities – possess obvious worth and generate meaning for participants. Other purposes – manipulating consumers, generating inequality, extracting resources unsustainably, and producing harmful products – prove morally indefensible despite potentially generating profits. Organizations oriented towards indefensible purposes generate alienation in morally sensitive participants who experience contradiction between organizational demands and ethical commitments (Michaelson et al., 2014).

Purpose plurality and stakeholder inclusion: Organizations serve multiple purposes for diverse stakeholders – profits for investors, wages for workers, products for customers, taxes for society, and employment for communities. Which purposes receive priority and how conflicts get resolved reveal organizational value commitments. Shareholder primacy ideology asserts profit maximization as a singular purpose, subordinating other purposes as mere constraints or instrumental means. This purpose structure generates

alienation in non-shareholder stakeholders who experience their legitimate interests as secondary. Alternative stakeholder conceptions recognize multiple legitimate purposes requiring balancing rather than hierarchical subordination (Freeman et al., 2020).

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, organizational purposes should be defensible (morally worthy), authentic (actually pursued rather than merely proclaimed), meaningful (connected to participants' values), and pluralistic (recognizing multiple legitimate stakeholder interests). Pathological purpose structures involve indefensible aims, hypocritical contradictions between professed and actual purposes, meaningless abstractions disconnected from concrete activities, or singular purpose orientations denying legitimate stakeholder claims.

Relational configurations and recognition structures: Organizations structure relationships – patterns of interaction, interdependence, authority, affect, and recognition linking organizational members. Following Honneth, relational structures fundamentally shape subjectivity, self-relation, and flourishing possibilities because humans develop as subjects only through intersubjective recognition. Organizational relationships can enable mutual recognition supporting self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem or generate misrecognition through abuse, rights denial, or denigration.

Hierarchical versus egalitarian structures: Organizations vary along hierarchical–egalitarian dimensions, with important consequences for recognition. Steep hierarchies materialize unequal status through pay differentials, spatial arrangements, decision authority, and symbolic markers. Hierarchies need not inherently contradict recognition if structured around functional differentiation, acknowledging diverse but equally necessary contributions. However, hierarchies often degenerate into domination – arbitrary power exercise, status privilege, and systematic subordination, denying lower-tier members' equal worth. Domination represents recognition pathology violating respect and generating resentment (Anderson, 2017).

Egalitarian structures attempt to create flatter arrangements through reduced hierarchy, democratic decision-making, or self-management. While potentially enabling greater recognition equality, egalitarian structures face co-ordination challenges and may generate informal hierarchies or status competitions absent formal structures. Moreover, mere structural flattening without cultural transformation or power redistribution produces pseudo-egalitarianism – egalitarian rhetoric masking persistent power asymmetries (Rothschild & Whitt, 1986).

Cooperative versus competitive orientations: Organizations cultivate cooperative or competitive relational norms with significant recognition implications. Cooperative norms emphasize mutual support, shared success, and collective achievement, enabling social resonance through interdependence. Competitive norms emphasize individual achievement,

zero-sum contests, and ranking, potentially generating interpersonal alienation through instrumentalization. While competition may motivate performance, excessive competition undermines social bonds, generates anxiety, and incentivizes others' failure rather than success. Organizations structuring reward systems, performance evaluations, or promotion processes competitively create conditions for mutual instrumentalization rather than recognition (Deutsch, 1949).

Communal versus contractual relationships: Organizations involve both communal relationships (characterized by care, particularistic concern, and intrinsic valuing) and contractual relationships (characterized by exchange, instrumentality, and conditional reciprocity). Ideal-typically, intimate relationships exemplify communal character, while market transactions exemplify contractual character. Actual organizational relationships typically combine both – employment involves not only contractual exchange (labour for wages) but also communal elements (loyalty, care, and identification). Organizations emphasizing purely contractual relations reduce members to exchangeable labour power, denying recognition of distinctive personhood. Organizations cultivating communal dimensions – expressing care for employee welfare, loyalty beyond strict exchange, and concern for whole persons rather than merely work contributions – enable deeper recognition (Sennett, 1998).

Inclusion and belonging: Organizations define boundaries distinguishing members from non-members, insiders from outsiders, with significant recognition implications. Who counts as a full organizational member, who receives only partial or conditional membership, and who remains excluded entirely? Inclusion represents recognition of belonging; exclusion constitutes recognition denial. Organizations exhibiting discriminatory inclusion patterns – systematically excluding or marginalizing particular demographic groups, relegating certain workers to precarious status, or creating two-tier membership systems – generate recognition injustice requiring rectification (Shore et al., 2011).

Relational quality and psychological safety: Beyond formal structures, actual relationship quality – whether interactions exhibit respect, trust, care, and authenticity or disrespect, suspicion, indifference, and instrumentalization – profoundly affects flourishing. Edmondson's (1999) concept of "psychological safety" – shared belief that one can speak up, ask questions, admit errors, or offer ideas without punishment or humiliation – captures crucial relational dimensions. Psychologically safe environments enable authentic participation and mutual recognition; psychologically unsafe environments generate defensive behaviour, silence, and misrecognition through fear.

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, organizational relational structures should enable mutual recognition across hierarchical levels, cultivate cooperation rather than destructive competition, combine contractual fairness

with communal care, practise inclusive belonging rather than exclusion, and generate psychological safety rather than fear. Pathological relational structures involve domination rather than functional differentiation, zero-sum competition destroying social bonds, purely instrumental relations denying personhood, discriminatory exclusion, and climates of fear preventing authentic participation.

Evaluative frameworks and normative orders: Organizations establish criteria for success, excellence, and worth that shape self-assessment, social recognition, and normative orientation. These evaluative frameworks constitute crucial *LebensFormen* dimensions because they define what organizational members should strive toward, how they will be judged, and what counts as a valuable contribution. Following Rosa, evaluative frameworks profoundly affect resonance possibilities by structuring whether work feels meaningful and responded to or arbitrary and futile.

Performance measurement systems: Contemporary organizations increasingly adopt comprehensive performance measurement – key performance indicators (KPIs), balanced scorecards, 360-degree evaluations, productivity tracking, and customer satisfaction metrics. Performance measurement can provide valuable feedback, accountability, and goal clarity. However, excessive measurement generates pathologies that Muller (2018) critiques as "tyranny of metrics": metric fixation distorting priorities towards measurable dimensions, gaming behaviours optimizing metrics rather than actual performance, and demoralization when complex work reduces to simplistic numbers. Performance measurement becomes pathological when treating measurement as an end rather than a means, reducing qualitative phenomena to quantitative indicators, or generating constant evaluative pressure undermining intrinsic motivation (Espeland & Sauder, 2007).

Meritocratic versus other evaluative logics: Organizations typically embrace meritocratic rhetoric – achievement and contribution, rather than ascribed characteristics, should determine recognition and advancement. While meritocracy seems fair, it exhibits problems: Defining "merit" proves contentious and often reflects dominant group advantages; meritocracy legitimizes inequality as deserved; and meritocracy ignores how unequal starting conditions affect achievement possibilities. Moreover, exclusive merit focus neglects legitimate alternative evaluative principles – need (distributing based on necessity), equality (distributing equally), or democratic decision (distributing through collective deliberation). Just organizations combine merit with other principles rather than merit alone (Mijs, 2016).

Recognition of diverse contributions: Organizational evaluative frameworks may recognize narrow contribution forms (profitable activities) or diverse contributions (knowledge creation, mentoring, community building, and ethical watchdogging). Narrow frameworks fail to recognize legitimate contributions, not easily quantified or directly profit-generating, generating

alienation in members who make unrecognized contributions. Expansive frameworks acknowledging diverse excellence forms enable broader recognition, though they create challenges in commensurability and evaluation (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

Developmental versus judgemental orientation: Evaluation can emphasize development (providing feedback for growth) or judgement (determining worth for rewards/punishments). Developmental orientations treat evaluation as a learning opportunity, generating psychological safety and growth mindsets. Judgemental orientations treat evaluation as final verdicts on worth, generating anxiety and fixed mindsets. While organizations require both development and accountability, overemphasis on judgement generates fear-based cultures undermining experimentation and learning (Dweck, 2006).

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, organizational evaluative frameworks should recognize diverse contributions rather than narrow definitions, balance multiple evaluative principles rather than merit alone, provide developmental feedback rather than merely judgement, and avoid metric reductionism, distorting activities towards measurable dimensions. Pathological evaluative structures involve metric tyranny, exclusive merit focus, ignoring inequality and need, narrow recognition of limited contribution forms, and purely judgemental orientations generating anxiety rather than development.

8.3.2 Organizational LebensFormen Typology: Illustrative Cases

To concretize the abstract dimensions analysed earlier, we can identify ideal-typical organizational forms of life exhibiting distinctive configurations across temporal, spatial, role, purpose, relational, and evaluative dimensions. These ideal types represent theoretical constructs rather than complete empirical descriptions, highlighting characteristic patterns while acknowledging that actual organizations exhibit hybrid forms.

Bureaucratic LebensFormen: Traditional bureaucracies, analysed classically by Weber (1978), instantiate distinctive forms of life characterized by temporal regularity (standard hours, predictable careers, and long-term employment); spatial hierarchy (offices materializing rank and physical proximity signalling intimacy); formal role clarity (precisely defined positions and impersonal rule following); rationalized purposes (efficient goal achievement through formal rationality); hierarchical relations (authority chains and formal communication); and rule-based evaluation (following procedures and meeting specifications).

Bureaucratic forms enable certain goods – predictability, fairness through impersonality, and co-ordination efficiency – while generating characteristic pathologies – meaningless routinization, rigid inflexibility, power concentration, and creative stifling. From a recognition perspective, bureaucracies

provide legal recognition (rule-governed treatment and formal rights) but often fail achievement recognition (contributions invisible within impersonal systems) and intimate recognition (impersonal relations prevent authentic care). From a resonance perspective, bureaucracies generate alienation through routinization, eliminating spontaneous elements necessary for engaged responsiveness (Adler, 2012).

Professional LebensFormen: Professional organizations (universities, hospitals, and law firms) organizing around credentialed expertise exhibit project-based temporality (concentrated engagement during projects and gaps between), collegial spatial forms (shared spaces for peer interaction and private spaces for concentrated work), vocational identity (professional commitment transcending particular employer), knowledge and service purposes (advancing understanding and helping clients), peer-based relations (collegial self-governance and merit-based respect), and peer evaluation (professional standards and portfolio assessment).

Professional forms enable autonomy, meaningful purpose, social recognition for expertise, and sustained concentration. Pathologies include exclusionary credentialism, peer conformity pressure, long-hours cultures, and commercialization undermining professional ethics. Professional forms generally succeed better at achievement recognition than bureaucracies but may generate informal hierarchies and exclusion of non-credentialed workers (Freidson, 2001).

Platform LebensFormen: Contemporary platform organizations (Uber, TaskRabbit, and Amazon Mechanical Turk) mediate market transactions through digital infrastructure, creating distinctive forms: extreme flexibility temporality (work on demand, unpredictable earnings, and no guaranteed hours), distributed spatiality (workers in own vehicles or homes and no shared workplace), independent contractor roles (formal self-employment and actual subordination to platform algorithms), facilitation purposes (connecting supply and demand through technical infrastructure), algorithmic relations (mediated through ratings and algorithms and minimal human interaction), and metric-driven evaluation (customer ratings, productivity metrics, and opaque algorithms).

Platform forms promise autonomy and flexibility while actually generating insecurity, surveillance, and algorithmic control. They represent recognition pathologies: denying legal recognition (contractor status excluding labour rights), achievement recognition (algorithmic evaluation providing no qualitative acknowledgement), and social recognition (atomized workers without community). Temporal structures prevent sustained engagement necessary for resonance, while algorithmic management constitutes pure reification, treating humans as programmable resources. Platform forms exemplify contemporary organizational pathologies requiring fundamental transformation (Kellogg et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2019).

Commons-based peer production LebensFormen: Open-source software development and Wikipedia exemplify alternative organizational forms characterized by voluntary temporality (contributing when motivated and no fixed schedules), virtual spatiality (online platforms enabling global collaboration), contributor roles (earned authority through contribution quality), shared knowledge purposes (creating public goods), peer relations (horizontal collaboration and merit-based respect), and peer evaluation (community recognition and transparent assessment).

These forms enable autonomy, meaningful contribution, social recognition, and collaboration while facing challenges in co-ordination, sustainability, and exclusion of those lacking the necessary cultural capital or free time. They demonstrate the possibility of non-market, non-hierarchical organizing based on intrinsic motivation and peer recognition rather than monetary compensation and managerial authority (Benkler, 2006).

8.3.3 Pathological Organizational LebensFormen: Systematic Failures

Drawing on Jaeggi's pathology concept, we can identify organizational forms exhibiting systematic failures – comprehensive breakdowns requiring fundamental transformation rather than incremental adjustment. Organizational pathologies manifest in purpose–performance contradictions, self-undermining dynamics, participant alienation, totalizing character, or learning incapacity.

Total institutions and identity colonization: Goffman's (1961) analysis of "total institutions" – prisons, mental hospitals, military barracks, and monasteries – illuminates extreme organizational pathology. Total institutions concentrate activities (sleeping, working, and playing) in single locations under a single authority, break down barriers between life spheres, impose scheduled activities, and pursue official aims through regimentation and mortification processes, stripping previous identities. While extreme examples like prisons clearly represent pathological forms, contemporary organizations exhibit totalizing tendencies when demanding complete identification, colonizing all waking hours, or requiring suppression of alternative identities. Technology companies expecting constant availability, consulting firms demanding 80-hour weeks, or ideological organizations requiring absolute commitment exemplify totalizing pathologies foreclosing space for autonomous identity formation outside organizational imperatives.

Meaningless work and existential vacuum: Organizations systematically fragmenting work into meaningless micro-tasks, providing no purpose comprehension, or producing obviously harmful outputs generate existential alienation. Graeber's (2018) analysis of "bullshit jobs" – positions workers themselves consider pointless – identifies widespread meaninglessness in contemporary employment. Administrative bloat, make-work projects, or

purposeless bureaucracy generate alienation not through physical exploitation but through meaning deprivation. From a *LebensFormen* perspective, meaningless work represents a failed form unable to answer questions about why one's activities matter or how they contribute to valuable purposes. Organizations generating systematic meaninglessness require transformation towards purposeful work enabling existential resonance.

Exploitation and recognition denial: Organizations extracting value from workers while providing inadequate compensation, denying voice rights, imposing dangerous conditions, or treating humans as disposable represent classic exploitation pathologies. Exploitation violates all three Honneth recognition spheres: Physical abuse or dangerous conditions violate bodily integrity recognition; arbitrary authority or rights denial violates legal recognition; and wage theft or contribution invisibility violates achievement recognition. Contemporary exploitation exhibits new forms – algorithmic wage theft, occupational health code violations, and gig economy precarity – alongside persistent traditional forms. Exploitation represents fundamental injustice requiring rectification through worker organization, regulation, or alternative ownership structures (Wright, 2010).

Acceleration pathologies and burn-out production: Organizations structuring temporal demands such that recovery becomes impossible to generate acceleration pathologies. When work pace prevents sustained attention, perpetual change prevents stability, constant availability prevents boundary formation, and evaluation pressure prevents relaxation, organizations systematically deplete rather than sustain human resources. Rosa's frenetic standstill – running faster to stay in place – captures this pathology: intense activity producing no meaningful accomplishment while generating exhaustion. The burn-out epidemic affecting contemporary workplaces reflects temporal pathologies requiring deceleration, boundary enforcement, and rejection of perpetual intensification (Maslach et al., 2001).

Algorithmic reification and control: Contemporary algorithmic management systems exemplify reification pathology – treating humans as programmable objects rather than autonomous subjects. When algorithms direct human activity, evaluate performance, allocate tasks, and discipline deviations without human judgement or recognition, they reduce workers to mechanistic components within technical systems. Delivery drivers following routing algorithms, warehouse workers meeting quotas, or content moderators processing materials under productivity pressure experience reified existence as things rather than persons. Algorithmic reification denies recognition, prevents resonance, and reduces work to mechanical execution rather than meaningful activity requiring transformation towards human-centred technology design acknowledging subjectivity (Kellogg et al., 2020).

8.4 Organizational Sustainability, Social Sustainability, and Human Flourishing

8.4.1 Critique of Mainstream Sustainability Frameworks

The sustainability concept has achieved remarkable discursive prominence since the Brundtland report (1987) defined sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 41). This formulation was crystallized in the "triple bottom line" framework emphasizing economic, environmental, and social dimensions (Elkington, 1997). Organizations increasingly embrace sustainability rhetoric, publishing reports, establishing programmes, and aligning with SDGs. Yet mainstream sustainability frameworks, examined through critical *LebensFormen* analysis, exhibit significant limitations.

Instrumental rationality and means–ends inversion: Mainstream sustainability discourse predominantly employs instrumental framings, treating environmental protection or social welfare as means towards organizational ends – risk management, reputation enhancement, and long-term profitability – rather than intrinsic commitments (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). Business case arguments emphasize how sustainability "pays" through cost reduction, stakeholder satisfaction, or innovation stimulation. While pragmatically useful for securing commitment, instrumental framing perpetuates precisely the instrumental rationality that critical theory identifies as pathological. Weber's (1978) analysis of rationalization processes emphasized how formal rationality – efficient goal achievement – increasingly dominates substantive rationality – reflection on goal worthiness. Instrumental sustainability continues this pattern, optimizing means without questioning whether ends deserve pursuit.

From Jaeggi's perspective, this represents failure to engage in genuine normative reflection about what purposes organizational activity should serve. Instrumental sustainability asks: "how can we sustain current arrangements?" rather than "what arrangements deserve sustaining?" It assumes growth orientation, consumption patterns, and profit imperatives while merely greening their execution. Authentic sustainability requires questioning whether these fundamental orientations themselves prove defensible or require transformation.

Weak sustainability and growth ideology: Ecological economists distinguish "weak sustainability," permitting substitution between natural and manufactured capital, from "strong sustainability" recognizing irreplaceable natural capital and absolute ecological limits (Neumayer, 2013). Mainstream sustainability embraces weak versions, assuming technological

substitution overcomes environmental constraints. This permits continued growth orientation and consumption expansion – core dynamics generating sustainability crises – largely unchallenged. Strong sustainability recognizes ecological boundaries requiring absolute constraints on resource throughput, questioning growth imperatives fundamental to contemporary capitalism.

From a critical *LebensFormen* perspective, weak sustainability represents failed problem-solving. The problem sustainability purportedly addresses – the ecological crisis threatening human existence – cannot be solved through marginal efficiency improvements within growth frameworks. The problem's causes – extractive growth orientation, fossil fuel dependence, and consumption patterns – require fundamental transformation. Weak sustainability's failure to address root causes exemplifies Jaeggi's concept of forms of life generating problems they cannot solve, requiring transformation towards alternative arrangements.

Social sustainability marginalization: Despite triple bottom line rhetoric, social sustainability receives less attention than environmental dimensions. Social sustainability encompasses labour practices, human rights, community impacts, diversity, equity, and well-being – domains often treated peripherally relative to carbon emissions or waste reduction (Vallance et al., 2011). This marginalization reflects multiple factors: Social impacts prove harder to quantify; social responsibility frameworks remain less institutionalized; and external pressures focus more on environmental than social performance.

Yet, from recognition and resonance perspectives, social sustainability proves equally fundamental. Organizations exploiting workers, generating inequality, or undermining community well-being – even while minimizing environmental impacts – fail sustainability tests. As Honneth emphasizes, just social arrangements require recognition structures enabling self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Organizations systematically denying recognition represent social pathologies regardless of environmental credentials. Authentic sustainability must integrate social dimensions centrally rather than marginally.

Present-centredness and justice gaps: Brundtland's definition emphasizes intergenerational equity – protecting future generations. While laudable, this temporal framing potentially obscures present injustices (Agyeman et al., 2016). Organizations might pursue long-term environmental sustainability while perpetuating contemporary exploitation. Sustainability discourse emphasizing futurity risks abstracting from concrete present suffering requiring immediate rectification. From a critical theory perspective emphasizing human suffering as a normative foundation, sustainability must address present injustice alongside future protection.

Moreover, sustainability discourse often neglects distributional justice – how benefits and burdens distribute across social groups. Environmental burdens

disproportionately affect marginalized communities through pollution exposure, climate vulnerability, and resource extraction impacts. Sustainability efforts failing to address these distributional inequities perpetuate environmental racism and class-based injustice (Schlosberg, 2007). From Honneth's recognition framework, distributional injustice represents misrecognition – systematic denial of equal moral worth through unequal burden allocation. Authentic sustainability requires environmental justice, integrating distributional concerns centrally rather than treating them as separate issues.

Measurement fetishism and reification: Sustainability measurement systems emphasize readily quantifiable metrics – carbon emissions, energy consumption, waste volumes, and water usage – while neglecting less quantifiable but equally important dimensions like meaningful work, dignity, community vitality, or resonance quality. This measurement bias reflects broader trends towards quantification that Muller (2018) critiques as "tyranny of metrics" and Espeland and Stevens (1998) analyse as "commensuration" – reducing qualitative differences to quantitative comparisons. What gets measured gets managed, but not all important phenomena prove measurable using available methodologies, and measurement itself transforms what it purports to merely represent.

From a critical theory perspective, sustainability measurement exemplifies reification – treating complex social and ecological relationships as thing-like quantities subject to calculation and manipulation. Rosa (2013) argues that quantification and acceleration reinforce one another: Measurement enables acceleration through comparability and benchmarking, while acceleration demands measurement for control. This dynamic generates alienation by transforming rich qualitative phenomena into abstract quantities, preventing resonant relationships requiring qualitative engagement beyond instrumental calculation.

Voluntarism and accountability deficits: Sustainability reporting suffers from a voluntary, self-regulated character, enabling greenwashing – symbolic gestures lacking substantive commitment (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011). Absent robust external verification and accountability mechanisms, sustainability disclosures may function primarily as reputation management rather than genuine transformation. Organizations face limited consequences for sustainability failures, weak enforcement of environmental regulations, and insufficient stakeholder power to demand accountability.

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, this voluntarism reflects power asymmetries, enabling organizations to avoid genuine transformation. Authentic sustainability requires not only voluntary initiatives but also binding commitments, democratic accountability, and stakeholder power to enforce obligations. This suggests moving beyond CSR towards mandatory reporting, stakeholder governance rights, and regulatory frameworks enforcing sustainability requirements.

Anthropocentrism and instrumental nature relations: Most organizational sustainability frameworks ultimately rest on anthropocentric premises – valuing nature instrumentally for human benefit rather than intrinsically. Environmental protections get justified through ecosystem services valuable to humans or risks to human welfare. Alternative ecocentric or biocentric perspectives recognizing intrinsic value in non-human nature remain marginal (Gladwin et al., 1995). This anthropocentrism limits sustainability imagination, potentially perpetuating exploitative orientations towards non-human nature even while moderating exploitation intensity.

Critical theory traditions, while predominantly humanistic, increasingly recognize that authentic emancipation requires transforming human–nature relationships beyond domination and instrumentalization. As Honneth (2008) argues, reification applies not only to human relationships but also to nature – treating the natural world as a mere resource stock or externality rather than recognizing interdependence and intrinsic worth. Rosa's resonance concept, while human-centred, emphasizes that flourishing requires resonant relationships with the non-human world – experiencing nature as addressing us, responding to us, and deserving care rather than mere exploitation. This suggests sustainability frameworks should cultivate what Plumwood (2002) calls "ecological solidarity" – recognizing human embeddedness within nature and ethical obligations towards non-human beings.

8.4.2 Social Sustainability as LebensFormen *Quality*

Addressing mainstream sustainability limitations requires reconceptualizing social sustainability not as a separate "pillar" alongside environmental and economic dimensions but as a fundamental question about organizational forms of life quality. Social sustainability concerns whether organizational *LebensFormen* enable or systematically frustrate human flourishing – whether they constitute successful or failed, rational or pathological, and emancipatory or oppressive forms of collective life. This reconceptualization integrates insights from Jaeggi's immanent critique, Honneth's recognition theory, and Rosa's resonance concept.

Social sustainability as problem-solving success: Following Jaeggi, socially sustainable organizations successfully address problems they exist to solve while avoiding problem generation that undermines their own reproduction. This requires examining:

Purpose fulfilment: Do organizational practices actually achieve stated purposes? Organizations claiming to serve customers, employees, communities, or public goods while systematically frustrating these purposes through contrary practices fail by their own standards. For instance, healthcare organizations professing patient welfare while implementing

practices preventing adequate care, educational institutions claiming student development while perpetuating inequality, or corporations announcing stakeholder commitment while exclusively serving shareholders exhibit purpose–performance contradictions signalling failed forms.

Reproductive sustainability: Do organizational practices maintain conditions enabling their own continuation? Organizations depleting employee health through overwork, destroying environmental resources enabling operations, eroding social trust through scandal, or exhausting community goodwill through exploitation undermine their own reproduction conditions. These reproductive contradictions reveal unsustainability requiring transformation. Socially sustainable organizations maintain rather than deplete human capabilities, social capital, institutional legitimacy, and community support necessary for ongoing viability.

Learning capacity: Can organizations recognize problems and adapt accordingly? Organizations exhibiting rigid defensiveness against criticism, inability to learn from failures, or systematic reality denial prove incapable of addressing emerging challenges. Pathological organizations resist feedback threatening established power relations or requiring fundamental change, preferring collapse to transformation. Socially sustainable organizations cultivate reflexivity – the capacity for critical self-examination and adaptive learning, enabling problem recognition and responsive transformation (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 361–403).

Social sustainability as recognition enablement: Following Honneth, socially sustainable organizations enable recognition across all three spheres – love, rights, and achievement – rather than systematically denying or distorting recognition. This requires:

Respect for embodied needs: Organizations should not systematically violate bodily integrity through dangerous conditions, excessive demands, or invasive surveillance. While organizations cannot provide intimate love recognition directly, they should not structure demands rendering intimate relationships impossible through temporal colonization or exhaustion. Work arrangements allowing recovery time, family engagement, and physical health maintenance enable rather than undermine recognition's emotional dimension.

Rights and voice: Organizations should respect legal recognition through due process, voice rights, and equal treatment rather than arbitrary authority or discrimination. This requires participatory governance enabling affected parties to influence decisions, grievance procedures providing recourse against injustice, and anti-discrimination policies protecting equal dignity. Organizations denying voice, imposing decisions unilaterally, or tolerating discrimination violate legal recognition requirements.

Achievement acknowledgement: Organizations should recognize diverse contributions rather than rendering valuable activities invisible or denying distinctive worth. This requires evaluation frameworks acknowledging multiple excellence forms, feedback systems providing meaningful recognition rather than mere metrics, and reward structures distributing social esteem fairly rather than concentrating it narrowly. Organizations systematically denying achievement recognition – through contribution invisibility, credit misattribution, or devaluation – violate esteem requirements (Honneth, 1995, pp. 131–139).

Social sustainability as resonance enablement: Following Rosa, socially sustainable organizations enable resonant rather than alienated relationships with work, colleagues, and organizational purposes. This requires:

Meaningful engagement: Work should genuinely move participants – addressing them as subjects, calling forth capabilities, and mattering beyond mere survival. Organizations structuring work as meaningless routines, arbitrary tasks, or purposeless busywork prevent the affection necessary for resonance. Meaningful work connects to defensible purposes, utilizes distinctive capabilities, produces visible effects, and allows spontaneous responsive moments transcending complete routinization.

Efficacy experience: Workers should experience the capacity to affect outcomes rather than powerlessness. Organizations where effort disappears into opaque systems producing no visible results, where feedback loops remain broken, or where worker judgement gets systematically ignored generate powerlessness and alienation. Resonant organizations provide clear connections between effort and outcomes, enable workers to see results of their labour, and respect worker judgement rather than imposing pure algorithmic control.

Transformative potential: Engaging work should transform both the worker (developing capabilities and gaining understanding) and the work world (producing valuable outcomes). Organizations preventing development through dead-end positions, offering no learning opportunities, or failing to utilize worker capacities stagnate rather than enable growth. Conversely, organizations providing excessive change without stability prevent mastery and coherent development. Resonant organizations balance stability, enabling competence with challenge fostering growth.

Temporal sustainability: Organizations should structure temporal demands enabling recovery, sustained attention, and meaningful engagement rather than acceleration, generating chronic scarcity and frenetic standstill. This requires rejecting perpetual intensification, protecting boundaries enabling recovery, allowing tempo variation

rather than constant pressure, and maintaining sufficient stability for meaningful relationship formation. Temporally sustainable organizations recognize that speed limits exist beyond which acceleration undermines rather than enhances productivity and meaning (Rosa, 2019, pp. 298–362).

Social sustainability as democratic legitimacy: Beyond individual flourishing, socially sustainable organizations should prove democratically legitimate – structured through processes respecting affected parties' voices rather than imposed unilaterally. This connects to Habermas's (1984) discourse ethics emphasizing that legitimate norms must be justifiable through uncoerced rational discourse among affected parties. Organizations become democratically legitimate through:

Stakeholder participation: Enabling affected parties – employees, communities, customers, and suppliers – to participate in decisions affecting them through formal governance rights, consultation processes, or representation mechanisms. Pure shareholder governance excluding other stakeholders from decisions affecting their lives violates democratic legitimacy.

Transparency and accountability: Providing accessible information about organizational decisions, impacts, and performance enables informed participation and accountability. Opacity preventing stakeholders from assessing organizational activities or holding decision-makers accountable undermines legitimacy.

Justification through public reason: Organizational decisions should be justifiable through reasons acceptable to affected parties rather than mere power exercise or profit maximization. When organizations cannot provide public justifications for practices affecting stakeholders, their legitimacy becomes questionable.

Procedural fairness: Decision processes should be fair – unbiased, consistent, representative, and correctable. Even when outcomes disappoint particular stakeholders, fair procedures enhance legitimacy by treating all parties respectfully and providing genuine participation opportunities (Habermas, 1996, pp. 107–193).

8.4.3 Integrated Sustainability: Connecting Environment, Society, and Flourishing

Authentic sustainability requires integrating environmental, economic, and social dimensions through recognizing deep interdependencies rather than treating them as competing priorities requiring trade-offs. From a critical *LebensFormen* perspective, this integration reflects the understanding that ecological crisis, social crisis, and meaning crisis share common roots in forms of life requiring transformation.

Shared pathology: Instrumental rationality and domination: Environmental destruction, social exploitation, and existential alienation share a common origin in instrumental rationality dominating modern societies. As Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) argued in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Enlightenment rationality promising liberation paradoxically generates new domination through instrumental reason, reducing nature and humans to objects of calculation and control. This instrumental orientation treats everything – nature, human labour, and social relationships – as mere means towards profit maximization or efficiency achievement.

Environmental unsustainability reflects instrumental nature treatment – viewing ecosystems as resource stocks or waste sinks rather than recognizing intrinsic worth or interdependence. Social unsustainability reflects instrumental human treatment – viewing workers as labour inputs or human capital rather than recognizing subjectivity and dignity. Existential alienation reflects instrumental self-relation – treating one's own life as a project requiring optimization rather than experiencing it as a meaningful engagement. These pathologies interconnect because they manifest the same underlying orientation: domination through instrumental reason (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, pp. 1–34).

Addressing this shared pathology requires transforming instrumental rationality itself rather than merely adjusting its applications. This suggests sustainability initiatives should cultivate alternative rationalities – communicative rationality enabling mutual understanding, aesthetic rationality enabling sensuous engagement, ethical rationality enabling normative reflection, and ecological rationality recognizing embeddedness within natural systems. Organizations dominated by instrumental optimization require cultural transformation towards orientations valuing quality over quantity, meaning over measurement, and relationships over results.

Shared solution: Deceleration and resonance: Rosa argues that addressing acceleration pathologies generating both ecological crisis (throughput growth) and alienation (frenetic standstill) requires deceleration – deliberately slowing processes to enable deeper engagement and sustainable resource use. Deceleration benefits the environment (reduced resource consumption and lower emissions) and humans (recovery time, sustained attention, and meaningful relationships) simultaneously. This suggests synergistic interventions:

Reduced work hours: Shorter workweeks would reduce environmental impacts (less production and less consumption) while improving well-being (more recovery, family time, and civic participation). Evidence from work-hour reduction experiments demonstrates environmental benefits and well-being improvements, suggesting this represents a win-win sustainability strategy (Pullinger, 2014).

Slow work practices: Deliberately slowing work processes to enable quality, craftsmanship, or deep engagement rather than rushing towards quantity targets. Slow work produces durable goods reducing environmental waste while providing meaningful engagement enabling resonance.

Temporal sovereignty: Enabling workers to control work tempo rather than external imposition through algorithmic pacing, surveillance pressure, or deadline tyranny. Temporal autonomy reduces stress while potentially reducing consumption driven by time scarcity and compensatory purchasing.

Stability creation: Reducing perpetual change, restructuring, and innovation imperatives that generate both environmental impacts (planned obsolescence and resource churn) and alienation (disorientation and anxiety). Greater stability enables deep relationships with tools, places, and practices supporting both environmental care and resonant engagement (Rosa, 2013, pp. 288–319).

Shared root: Growth ideology and accumulation imperatives: Environmental limits and human flourishing both collide with capitalist growth imperatives, requiring perpetual accumulation and expansion. Ecological economics demonstrates that infinite growth on a finite planet proves impossible, yet contemporary capitalism requires continuous growth for stability – generating crisis when growth slows (Jackson, 2017). Similarly, growth imperatives drive work intensification, consumption pressure, and meaning erosion as organizations prioritize expansion over human needs.

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, growth-dependent capitalism represents a failed form that generates problems it cannot solve. It promises prosperity through growth, yet growth itself generates ecological destruction and social alienation. This contradiction between system requirements and flourishing conditions suggests that authentic sustainability may require post-growth or degrowth alternatives – economic arrangements not requiring expansion for stability and orienting towards sufficiency rather than accumulation (Kallis, 2018).

This radical implication challenges mainstream sustainability, assuming capitalist frameworks. Yet, from an immanent critique perspective, if capitalism systematically generates unsustainability, then genuine sustainability requires transcending capitalism rather than merely greening it. This doesn't provide a blueprint for alternatives but suggests sustainability thinking should explore post-capitalist possibilities – cooperatives, commons-based production, solidarity economies, or democratic socialism – capable of operating within ecological limits while supporting flourishing (Wright, 2010).

Synergistic practices and genuine trade-offs: While sharing root causes suggests integrated solutions, honest sustainability analysis must acknowledge both synergies and genuine tensions:

Synergistic interventions: Many practices benefit multiple dimensions simultaneously; eliminating toxic substances protects ecosystems and worker health; local sourcing reduces transportation emissions while supporting community economies; renewable energy reduces climate impacts while generating stable employment; product longevity reduces waste while providing craft work; and cooperative ownership enables democratic participation while distributing benefits equitably.

Necessary trade-offs: Some genuine tensions exist – environmental protection may eliminate jobs in extractive industries; consumption reduction may impact employment in discretionary sectors; and material equality may require reduced consumption among the affluent. Acknowledging these tensions honestly prevents facile win-win rhetoric while enabling deliberation about how to navigate trade-offs justly.

Distributional justice: When trade-offs exist, justice requires that burdens not fall disproportionately on already marginalized groups. Sustainability transitions imposing costs on working-class communities while protecting elite interests violate justice. "Just transition" framework emphasizes that sustainability transformations must include support for affected workers and communities, democratic participation in transition planning, and equitable burden distribution (Newell & Mulvaney, 2013).

8.5 Happiness, Flourishing, and Organizational Life: Critical Perspectives

8.5.1 Beyond Subjective Well-Being: Critical Approaches to Happiness Research

Happiness research has proliferated across disciplines – psychology, economics, and organizational behaviour – generating substantial knowledge about well-being determinants. However, mainstream happiness research exhibits limitations when examined through critical theoretical lenses, particularly its tendency towards subjectivism, individualism, and adaptation neglect.

Subjective well-being and adaptive preferences: Most happiness research defines well-being subjectively – as self-reported life satisfaction, positive effect, or happiness ratings. While subjective experience matters, exclusive subjectivism faces problems that Sen (1999) identifies through the "adaptive preferences" critique. People adapt expectations to circumstances, reporting satisfaction even in objectively oppressive conditions – what Elster (1983) calls "sour grapes." Workers in exploitative conditions may report satisfaction

through adaptation, resigned acceptance, or internalized oppression. Taking such reports at face value naturalizes injustice rather than recognizing it as requiring rectification.

From a critical theory perspective, subjective well-being measures may reflect false consciousness – distorted self-understanding resulting from ideological manipulation, limited alternative experiences, or defensive adaptation. Marcuse (1964) argued that advanced capitalism generates "happy consciousness" – satisfied adjustment to repressive arrangements through consumerism and ideological manipulation. People may report happiness while living truncated lives excluding genuine autonomy, creativity, or solidarity. Authentic flourishing requires not only subjective satisfaction but also objective conditions enabling self-realization (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 111–166).

Individualism and social context neglect: Mainstream happiness research predominantly focuses on individual characteristics (personality, genetics, and cognitive patterns) as well-being determinants, relatively neglecting social structures and institutional arrangements. This methodological individualism treats society as a mere aggregation of individuals rather than recognizing that social forms fundamentally shape subjectivity possibilities.

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, well-being cannot be understood individualistically because subjectivity itself emerges through social practices and institutional arrangements. The relevant question isn't merely "What makes individuals happy?" but "What social forms enable flourishing?" These shifts focus from individual psychology towards institutional design and social criticism. Jaeggi argues that forms of life, not isolated individuals, constitute appropriate evaluation units – we should ask whether forms of life enable member flourishing rather than merely whether individuals achieve satisfaction within existing arrangements (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 242–293).

Hedonic adaptation and hedonic treadmill: Happiness research documents "hedonic adaptation" – the tendency for well-being levels to return towards baseline after positive or negative events. Income increases, promotions, or material acquisitions produce temporary satisfaction spikes followed by adaptation, generating a "hedonic treadmill," a perpetual pursuit of higher income, or consumption producing no lasting well-being gains (Brickman & Campbell, 1971).

While adaptation research provides valuable insights, it risks generating resignation – if people adapt to circumstances regardless, why pursue social justice or institutional reform? From a critical perspective, adaptation reflects not fixed human nature but responses to existing constraints. When alternatives seem unavailable, people adapt defensively. This doesn't legitimize oppressive arrangements but rather illustrates how they shape subjectivity itself. Critical theory insists on maintaining tension between actual

adaptation and potential transformation, recognizing that people adapt while insisting this adaptation doesn't exhaust human possibility or legitimate limiting conditions (Jaeggi, 2014, pp. 108–142).

Eudaimonic alternatives: Capability, recognition, and resonance: Critical and philosophical traditions offer richer conceptualizations transcending subjective satisfaction towards eudaimonic flourishing – living well through virtue, capability realization, recognition, and resonance. These frameworks provide resources for criticizing arrangements generating subjective satisfaction through adaptation while restricting authentic development.

Capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011): Well-being consists in capabilities – real freedoms to achieve valuable functioning. The capability approach emphasizes both freedom (options available) and achievement (functioning realized). Good organizations expand capabilities through skill development opportunities, meaningful choice provision, resource access enabling functioning achievement, and social conditions supporting capability exercise. Organizations constricting capabilities – through monotonous work, authoritarian control, resource deprivation, or discrimination – undermine flourishing regardless of subjective satisfaction reports.

Recognition approach (Honneth, 1995, 2014): Well-being emerges through recognition in three spheres, enabling self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Organizations contribute to flourishing by providing emotional recognition (care for employee welfare), legal recognition (rights respect and voice provision), and achievement recognition (acknowledging contributions). Misrecognition – through abuse, rights denial, or denigration – harms well-being fundamentally, not reducible to subjective displeasure but constituting objective injury requiring rectification.

Resonance approach (Rosa, 2019): Well-being consists of resonant relationships with world, others, and self – experiences of meaningful affection, efficacy, transformation, and spontaneity. Organizations enable resonance through meaningful work addressing participants genuinely, efficacy opportunities producing visible effects, learning enabling mutual transformation, and spaces for spontaneity transcending complete routinization. Alienation – indifference, powerlessness, rigidity, and reification – represents opposite resonance, indicating well-being failure.

These frameworks converge on several themes: Well-being requires not only subjective satisfaction but also objective conditions enabling development, recognition, and meaningful engagement. Good organizations create such conditions; bad organizations systematically prevent them. Evaluating organizational arrangements requires examining whether they enable or frustrate capability development, provide or deny recognition, and support or prevent resonance – questions transcending subjective satisfaction surveys.

8.5.2 Organizational Determinants of Flourishing: Empirical Evidence Through Critical Lenses

Substantial empirical research examines organizational factors affecting employee well-being, identifying conditions supporting or undermining flourishing. Interpreting this research through critical *LebensFormen*, recognition, and resonance frameworks reveals convergent insights while highlighting limitations in mainstream approaches.

Autonomy and self-determination: Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) identifies autonomy as a basic psychological need whose satisfaction enables well-being, while thwarting generates ill-being. Organizational research consistently demonstrates autonomy benefits: Job autonomy predicts well-being, engagement, creativity, and performance; autonomy-supportive management enhances motivation; and autonomy restriction generates stress and burn-out (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, autonomy reflects recognition of personhood – treating employees as self-determining subjects rather than mere instruments. Organizations providing genuine autonomy enable social freedom – pursuing one's purposes through institutional frameworks supporting rather than constraining choice. However, mainstream autonomy research often treats autonomy individualistically, neglecting how organizational power structures may limit meaningful autonomy regardless of formal freedom. Critical analysis examines whether apparent autonomy reflects genuine self-determination or merely responsibilization – transferring risks and burdens to individuals while concentrating power and rewards (Fleming, 2014, pp. 68–91).

Meaningful work and purpose: Research demonstrates that meaningful work – experienced as purposeful, significant, and worthwhile – strongly predicts well-being, engagement, and life satisfaction (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Steger et al., 2012). Workers finding meaning in activities exhibit higher well-being, commitment, and performance than those experiencing meaninglessness. Meaning derives from comprehensible purposes connecting activities to valuable outcomes, using distinctive capabilities in ways that feel authentic, producing tangible results benefiting others, and transcending pure instrumentality towards intrinsic worthwhileness.

From a resonance perspective, meaningful work enables existential resonance – connection to purposes that matter genuinely and address one subjectively. Meaningless work, conversely, represents alienation – activities experienced as arbitrary, pointless, or disconnected from authentic values. Organizations should therefore provide not only interesting tasks but also defensible purposes worthy of commitment. However, mainstream meaning research sometimes treats meaning purely subjectively – anything workers

find meaningful suffices – neglecting whether organizational purposes themselves prove defensible. Critical analysis examines purpose legitimacy: Do organizational activities genuinely contribute to human welfare, or do they produce harm, frivolity, or exploitation? Meaning derived from illegitimate purposes (manipulating consumers, exploiting vulnerabilities, and generating inequality) represents false consciousness requiring critique rather than celebration (Michaelson et al., 2014).

Social support and relational quality: Extensive research demonstrates social support's well-being benefits. Supportive colleagues and supervisors buffer stress, enhance engagement, and improve health outcomes. Workplace friendships provide belonging, emotional support, and meaning. Conversely, interpersonal conflict, isolation, abusive supervision, and discrimination harm well-being substantially (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008).

From a recognition perspective, social support reflects recognition practices, colleagues and supervisors acknowledging worth, providing care, and validating contributions. Supportive relationships enable self-confidence, while abusive or neglectful relationships constitute misrecognition, damaging self-relation. However, social support research sometimes treats relationships purely instrumentally – as stress buffers or performance enhancers – neglecting their intrinsic worth as constitutive of a good life. Critical analysis emphasizes that humans are social beings whose flourishing depends fundamentally on relationship quality, not only as a means to individual well-being but also as intrinsically constitutive of what well-being means. Organizations should cultivate relationships for their own sake, not merely instrumentally (Honneth, 1995, pp. 95–107).

Justice and fairness: Organizational justice research examines fairness perceptions across distributive (outcome allocation), procedural (decision process), interpersonal (treatment respect), and informational (explanation provision) dimensions. Perceived justice consistently predicts well-being, trust, commitment, and citizenship behaviours, while injustice predicts stress, cynicism, and deviance (Colquitt et al., 2001).

From a recognition perspective, justice represents structural recognition – institutional arrangements treating persons with equal respect rather than degrading or exploiting them. Distributive justice acknowledges contributions fairly; procedural justice respects agency through voice provision; interpersonal justice conveys dignity through respectful treatment; and informational justice honours rationality through honest communication. Injustice constitutes institutional misrecognition requiring structural rectification rather than merely individual compensation. However, mainstream justice research often treats fairness subjectively – focusing on perceptions rather than objective justice standards – and individualistically – examining how individuals experience justice rather than whether institutional

arrangements are actually just. Critical analysis insists on objective justice standards and structural evaluation (Honneth, 2014, pp. 34–110).

Control over work intensity and time: Research demonstrates that control over work pace and intensity predicts well-being, while excessive demands combined with low control generate job strain and health problems (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Work intensification, time pressure, and overload consistently harm well-being, particularly when combined with limited autonomy.

From Rosa's perspective, this reflects temporal pathology – acceleration beyond rhythms enabling sustained attention, recovery, or meaningful engagement. Organizations structuring demands requiring perpetual hurry, multitasking, or exhaustion prevent resonance by eliminating temporal space for responsive engagement. Workers report feeling fragmented, overwhelmed, and unable to do justice to any activity when demands exceed capacity for quality engagement. Authentic flourishing requires temporal structures enabling both intensive engagement during work periods and adequate recovery enabling restoration. However, mainstream research often treats intensity and control as separable factors requiring balancing rather than recognizing their interaction: Even high control cannot compensate for chronically excessive demands depleting workers over time. Critical analysis examines whether organizational temporal demands remain sustainable or systematically extract more than workers can healthily provide (Rosa, 2013, pp. 261–287).

Learning and development opportunities: Research demonstrates that learning opportunities, skill utilization, and development prospects predict well-being and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Work enabling capability development, mastery experiences, and growth satisfies competence needs while supporting flourishing. Conversely, stagnant work offering no development frustrates competence needs and wastes human potential.

From a capability perspective, learning opportunities represent capability expansion – developing real freedoms to achieve valuable functionings. Organizations should provide not only employment but also developmental opportunities enabling human potential realization. However, mainstream development research sometimes treats learning purely instrumentally – as human capital investment enhancing organizational productivity rather than recognizing development as intrinsically valuable human rights. Critical analysis emphasizes that humans possess inherent worth beyond economic contribution, deserving development opportunities regardless of productivity implications. Moreover, what capabilities get developed matters: Organizations should support capabilities enabling flourishing – creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration – rather than merely technical skills serving organizational efficiency (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 33–34).

Job security and stability: Employment security consistently predicts well-being, while precarity and insecurity generate anxiety, stress, and health problems (Kalleberg, 2011). Precarious employment – temporary contracts, zero-hours arrangements, and at-will termination – creates chronic insecurity undermining well-being even when employment continues. Instability prevents long-term planning, undermines identity formation, and generates constant anxiety about livelihood.

From a recognition perspective, precarity denies temporal recognition – organizational commitment to worker futures. Treating workers as disposable, easily replaceable, or contingently valuable communicates that they lack worth beyond immediate utility. This instrumental treatment constitutes misrecognition violating dignity. Moreover, precarity exemplifies Jaeggi's reproductive contradiction – organizations undermining their own conditions by destabilizing the workforce commitment and skill development organizational success precisely requires. Short-term flexibility generates long-term instability, which is destructive to both workers and organizations. However, security discourse sometimes treats stability purely economically – as income predictability – neglecting deeper existential needs for coherent identity narratives requiring stable commitments over time. Critical analysis emphasizes that humans require temporal coherence – the ability to form projects, develop expertise, and maintain relationships over extended periods – that precarity fundamentally frustrates (Sennett, 1998, pp. 88–117).

8.5.3 Positive Organizational Scholarship: Potential and Limitations

POS emerged as a movement within organizational studies, emphasizing positive phenomena – virtues, strengths, resilience, and thriving – rather than exclusively focusing on problems, pathologies, or deficits (Cameron & Cavarretta, 2012). While offering valuable insights, POS exhibits limitations when examined through critical lenses.

Strengths of POS: POS contributes valuable research on organizational practices supporting flourishing: strengths-based approaches enabling individuals to utilize distinctive capabilities; positive leadership inspiring, empowering, and caring for employees; high-quality connections characterized by mutual regard and vitality; thriving involving both learning and vitality; resilience enabling adaptation to adversity; and positive deviance achieving extraordinary positive outcomes (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012).

This research documents that organizations cultivating positive relationships, enabling meaning, and supporting development achieve both humanistic and performance benefits – the so-called double dividend of positive organizational practices. From a flourishing perspective, POS research provides empirical support for normative claims about good organizational

LebensFormen – demonstrating that arrangements supporting human needs also enhance organizational effectiveness.

Limitations and critical concerns: Despite contributions, POS faces several limitations:

Power evasion: POS often neglects power relations, conflict, and structural inequality, focusing instead on individual psychology and interpersonal dynamics. These risks are treating organizational problems as individual deficits requiring positive reframing rather than structural injustices requiring transformation. For instance, POS research on resilience may emphasize individual stress management rather than questioning whether work demands should be reduced; strengths-based approaches may focus on utilizing existing capabilities rather than asking why some capabilities get valued while others are devalued (Fineman, 2006).

From a critical perspective, this power evasion represents ideological function, legitimizing existing arrangements by making adjustment seem purely individual responsibility. Authentic flourishing requires not only helping individuals adapt positively to circumstances but also transforming circumstances themselves when they systematically frustrate flourishing. Critical positivity would combine attention to positive potential with structural critique examining why potential remains unrealized under current arrangements (Spicer et al., 2009).

Acritical affirmation: POS sometimes exhibits uncritical affirmation of organizational goodness, emphasizing positive phenomena while downplaying negatives. This risks "toxic positivity," mandatory cheerfulness obscuring legitimate grievances or suffering. Organizations demanding constant positivity silence criticism, prevent problem identification, and generate emotional labour burdens, particularly for marginalized workers expected to suppress negative experiences (Bell & Forbes, 2014).

From an immanent critique perspective, genuine positivity requires honest problem acknowledgement as a foundation for transformation rather than denial. Jaeggi emphasizes that identifying failures, contradictions, and pathologies motivates transformation towards better arrangements. Premature positivity foreclosing criticism prevents learning necessary for improvement. Authentic organizational development requires both appreciating successes and confronting failures honestly (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 294–360).

Individualistic reductionism: POS often focuses on individual attitudes, behaviours, and experiences rather than institutional structures and collective practices. This individualism treats flourishing as personal achievement requiring individual effort rather than collective accomplishment requiring institutional transformation. For instance, research emphasizing individual gratitude, optimism, or mindfulness as well-being

determinants risks implying that suffering results from inadequate positive psychology rather than oppressive conditions.

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, flourishing requires institutional arrangements enabling rather than frustrating human potential. While individual differences matter, organizational forms fundamentally shape flourishing possibilities. Critical positivity would examine how institutional arrangements distribute flourishing opportunities unequally and what transformations could enable more universal flourishing rather than helping privileged individuals maximize personal well-being within unjust structures (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011).

Instrumentalization of well-being: POS sometimes frames well-being instrumentally – as a means towards organizational performance rather than an intrinsic good. This "business case" framing treats human flourishing as valuable primarily when generating productivity, profitability, or competitive advantage. While instrumental arguments may persuade managers, they perpetuate precisely the instrumental rationality that critical theory identifies as pathological (Ehrenreich, 2009).

From an ethical perspective, human flourishing possesses intrinsic worth regardless of organizational performance implications. Organizations should support well-being because persons deserve flourishing, not merely because flourishing enhances profits. Critical positivity would ground well-being concern in human dignity and rights rather than instrumental calculation, while recognizing that just arrangements often prove effective arrangements – treating people well generates both ethical and practical benefits without reducing ethical claims to instrumental ones.

Integrating positive insights with a critical perspective: Rather than rejecting POS entirely, critical *LebensFormen* analysis can integrate valuable insights while addressing limitations. This requires:

Structural positivity: Examining institutional arrangements enabling flourishing rather than merely individual psychological states. What organizational forms of life support thriving? What structural transformations would expand flourishing possibilities?

Power-aware positivity: Recognizing how power relations distribute flourishing opportunities unequally and examining transformations enabling more universal access to positive experiences. Who flourishes under current arrangements and who suffers? What changes would redistribute flourishing more justly?

Critical-constructive dialectic: Combining problem identification with solution imagination – using critique to motivate transformation while developing positive visions of alternative possibilities. What fails in current arrangements, and what might succeed better?

Intrinsic well-being valuation: Grounding flourishing concern in human dignity rather than instrumental performance benefits while recognizing compatibility between ethical treatment and organizational effectiveness.

8.6 Designing for Flourishing: Organizational Principles for Sustainable Well-Being

8.6.1 Temporal Design: Beyond Acceleration

Addressing temporal pathologies requires deliberate organizational design enabling sustainable rhythms, boundary protection, and temporal sovereignty rather than acceleration and intensification.

Workload limits and intensity management: Organizations should establish absolute limits on working hours, mandate rest periods, and prevent chronic overwork through maximum hour limits (40-hour standard weeks and overtime restrictions), mandatory rest (daily breaks, weekly rest days, and annual leave minima), workload monitoring (tracking demands, identifying overload, and redistributing work), and the right to disconnect (protecting off-hours time from work intrusion and establishing communication boundaries).

These limits recognize that humans possess finite energies requiring restoration and that chronic overwork depletes capacities necessary for both well-being and sustainable performance. From Rosa's perspective, limits create temporal space enabling recovery, family engagement, civic participation, and resonant relationships impossible under constant work pressure. However, limits require genuine enforcement rather than formal policies undermined by informal expectations or competitive pressure. Organizations must cultivate cultures legitimizing boundary maintenance rather than glorifying overwork, with leadership modelling healthy boundaries and performance evaluation systems not penalizing those who protect personal time (Perlow & Porter, 2009).

Temporal sovereignty and schedule control: Beyond limiting hours, organizations should maximize employee control over work timing through flexible scheduling (choosing start/end times, compressed weeks, and seasonal variations), predictable schedules (advance notice of hours and protection against last-minute changes), synchronization support (co-ordinating schedules with family obligations and care responsibilities), and tempo variation (enabling periods of intensity followed by recovery rather than constant pressure).

Temporal sovereignty enables workers to co-ordinate professional demands with other legitimate life commitments, reducing work-family conflict while honouring multiple identity dimensions. From an autonomy perspective, schedule control represents recognition of agency – treating

workers as self-determining subjects capable of managing temporal allocation rather than passive recipients of imposed schedules. However, flexibility must be bidirectional rather than merely benefiting organizations. "Flexibility" enabling employers to vary schedules unpredictably while workers lose planning capacity represents flexibility in name only. Authentic temporal sovereignty requires worker control over timing alongside organizational co-ordination needs (Lambert et al., 2019).

Deceleration practices and slow work: Organizations should deliberately cultivate slowness in appropriate domains through extended timelines (allowing adequate time for quality work rather than arbitrary deadline pressure), single-tasking support (enabling sustained focus on single activities rather than perpetual multitasking), reflection time (scheduled periods for thinking, learning, and integration rather than constant activity), contemplative practices (meditation spaces, quiet rooms, and nature access enabling restoration), and meeting reduction (eliminating unnecessary meetings and protecting concentration time).

Deceleration contradicts dominant acceleration imperatives but proves essential for work requiring depth – creative problem-solving, innovation, strategic thinking, relationship building, or craft quality. Rosa argues that certain activities inherently resist acceleration without quality deterioration: Authentic conversation, teaching and learning, democratic deliberation, or artistic creation possess "eigenzeit," intrinsic temporalities that cannot be compressed beyond certain limits without destroying the activities themselves. Organizations should recognize these temporal variances, allowing slow time for activities requiring depth while potentially accelerating routine operations (Rosa, 2013, pp. 150–205).

Stability creation amid change: Organizations should balance necessary adaptation with stability enabling competence development and relationship formation through core stability (maintaining certain processes, relationships, or purposes over extended periods), change bundling (implementing multiple changes together rather than constant piecemeal disruption), consolidation periods (allowing stability after major changes for adaptation and learning), and transparent change rationales (explaining why changes prove necessary rather than appearing arbitrary).

Stability enables what Sennett (1998) calls "narrative coherence," the ability to construct meaningful life stories connecting past, present, and future into intelligible wholes. Perpetual change fragments narratives, making it impossible to see one's trajectory or accumulated accomplishments. From a *LebensFormen* perspective, stable forms enable practice mastery and community formation, which is impossible under constant flux. However, stability differs from rigidity: Organizations should enable learning and adaptation rather than defensive resistance to necessary change. The goal

involves "dynamic stability," maintaining core identity and relationships while adapting peripheral elements responsively (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

8.6.2 Spatial and Material Design: Enabling Resonance and Recognition

Physical organizational environments profoundly shape experience, relationship possibilities, and recognition patterns, requiring thoughtful design rather than default efficiency maximization.

Diverse spatial ecologies: Organizations should provide spatial diversity accommodating different work modes rather than uniform spaces forcing single interaction patterns: concentration spaces (quiet areas for focused individual work), collaboration spaces (areas supporting group interaction and co-creation), social spaces (informal areas for relationship building and community), contemplative spaces (areas for restoration, reflection, or meditation), and personalization opportunities (allowing workspace customization expressing identity).

This diversity recognizes that work involves multiple modes – concentration, collaboration, creativity, routine execution, and learning – requiring different spatial configurations. Monotonous open plans forcing all activities into a single spatial template frustrate diverse needs while generating sensory overload and privacy deficits. From a recognition perspective, spatial diversity honours varying work styles and needs rather than imposing uniform arrangements (Waber et al., 2014).

Privacy and boundary protection: Organizations should protect privacy rather than total visibility through enclosed spaces (private offices or quiet rooms for sensitive work), acoustic management (soundproofing, noise reduction, and spatial buffers), visual privacy (sightline interruption and personal space delineation), and surveillance limits (restricting monitoring to legitimate purposes and respecting dignity).

Privacy enables concentration, confidential conversations, emotional regulation, and personal space necessary for psychological well-being. Total visibility generates surveillance anxiety, impression management burdens, and cognitive overload from constant sensory stimulation. However, privacy must balance with community – completely isolated individuals who cannot form relationships or communities. The goal involves graduated privacy enabling both solitude when needed and social connection when desired rather than a forced choice between extremes (Altman, 1975).

Recognition through spatial arrangements: Spatial configurations should materialize respect rather than degradation through equitable allocation (avoiding dramatic spatial inequality signalling status hierarchies), dignified conditions (ensuring adequate space, lighting, ventilation, and comfort for

all workers), aesthetic quality (providing pleasant environments rather than purely utilitarian spaces), and inclusive design (accommodating diverse abilities, cultural practices, and needs).

Spatial arrangements constitute recognition practice, communicating through material form how much workers matter and whether they deserve dignity. Opulent executive offices alongside cramped worker spaces materialize inequality and disrespect. Aesthetic impoverishment – ugly, uncomfortable, or degrading spaces – communicates that occupants lack worth, justifying quality environments. From a recognition perspective, all organizational members deserve dignified working conditions regardless of hierarchical position (Honneth, 1995, pp. 131–139).

Biophilic and sustainable design: Organizations should incorporate natural elements and environmental sustainability through natural light (maximizing daylight access and avoiding windowless spaces), nature connection (plants, green walls, outdoor spaces, and natural materials), environmental responsibility (energy efficiency, renewable power, waste reduction, and sustainable materials), and health optimization (air quality, temperature control, and ergonomic furniture).

Biophilic design recognizes human needs for nature connection, supporting well-being while expressing environmental values. Research demonstrates that nature access reduces stress, enhances cognitive function, and improves mood (Kellert & Calabrese, 2015). From a resonance perspective, nature connection enables material resonance – responsive relationships with non-human world supporting flourishing. Environmental sustainability in building design demonstrates organizational commitment to ecological responsibility beyond rhetoric.

8.6.3 Role and Identity Design: Recognition and Development

Role structures should enable identity formation, recognition, and development rather than fragmentation, degradation, or stagnation.

Meaningful role integration: Organizations should structure roles providing comprehensible purposes (clear connections between activities and valuable outcomes), task variety (diverse activities utilizing multiple capabilities rather than extreme fragmentation), task significance (visible impact on others' well-being or organizational success), whole task engagement (completing meaningful units rather than disconnected fragments), and client relationships (direct connection with those benefiting from work).

Job characteristics theory demonstrates that these dimensions generate experienced meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of results, predicting motivation and well-being (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). From a resonance perspective, meaningful role integration enables workers to experience how their activities matter and affect others – producing the efficacy,

affection, and transformation constituting resonance. Extreme fragmentation, conversely, generates alienation by rendering opaque how one's activities connect to larger purposes or affect anyone (Rosa, 2019, pp. 341–362).

Autonomy and discretion: Roles should provide genuine decision authority through method autonomy (freedom to determine how tasks get accomplished), scheduling autonomy (control over work timing and sequencing), criteria autonomy (participation in defining performance standards), and strategic autonomy (voice in departmental or organizational direction).

Autonomy satisfies self-determination needs while expressing recognition of competence and personhood. However, autonomy without resources, support, or reasonable demands becomes responsibilization – transferring risks while maintaining control. Authentic autonomy requires not only formal freedom but also capability support enabling effective agency (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Development pathways and growth: Organizations should provide learning opportunities (challenging assignments, training access, and mentorship), skill progression (advancing from novice to expert levels), career advancement (promotion possibilities, lateral moves, and special projects), capability recognition (acknowledging developing competence and providing feedback), and portable skills (developing capabilities valuable beyond a particular employer).

Development opportunities satisfy competence needs while treating workers as developing subjects rather than static resources. From a capability perspective, organizations should enable rather than constrain human potential through developmental support. However, development should not become pure instrumental skill acquisition for organizational benefit but should enable human flourishing broadly, including critical thinking, ethical judgement, and citizenship capacities transcending narrow job requirements (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 84–97).

Dignity and anti-degradation: All organizational roles deserve dignity through respect norms (prohibiting abuse, harassment, or denigration), fair treatment (consistent standards, due process, and grievance mechanisms), voice rights (ability to raise concerns, challenge unfairness, and participate in decisions), and status equality (avoiding gratuitous status hierarchies or symbolic degradation).

Some work involves difficult conditions – physical demands, environmental exposure, or emotional labour – but no work should involve systematic degradation or disrespect. Occupations often stigmatized – cleaning, care work, and service work – deserve equal dignity despite performing different functions. From a recognition perspective, all workers merit respect as persons regardless of occupational status, with compensation and working conditions reflecting contribution difficulty rather than assuming some workers deserve degradation (Anderson, 2017, pp. 54–87).

Role multiplicity integration: Organizations should enable workers to integrate professional roles with other identities through family-supportive policies (parental leave, childcare support, and flexible arrangements), civic engagement support (volunteer time and democratic participation accommodation), personal development respect (education support, sabbaticals, and identity exploration), and whole-person acknowledgement (recognizing workers as complex persons rather than merely role occupants).

Humans simultaneously inhabit multiple roles – worker, family member, citizen, community participant, and learner – whose flourishing requires integration rather than forced compartmentalization. Organizations demanding exclusive identification or structuring demands preventing other role fulfilment force impossible choices between legitimate identities. From a *LebensFormen* perspective, good organizational forms enable rich lives spanning multiple domains rather than colonizing all temporal and psychological space (Honneth, 2014, pp. 138–171).

8.6.4 Governance and Participation: Democratic Legitimacy

Organizational governance structures profoundly affect whether arrangements prove democratically legitimate and enable social freedom.

Stakeholder governance: Organizations should include affected stakeholders in governance through employee representation (works councils, board seats, and union recognition), community consultation (engagement with local stakeholders on matters affecting them), customer voice (mechanisms for user input on products and services), and multi-stakeholder boards (governance bodies representing diverse constituencies rather than shareholders alone).

Stakeholder governance recognizes that organizations affect multiple constituencies whose interests deserve consideration in decisions affecting them. Pure shareholder governance privileges one constituency arbitrarily while excluding others with legitimate stakes. From a democratic theory perspective, those affected by decisions should participate in making them – a principle applicable to economic institutions alongside political ones. However, stakeholder governance faces challenges in representation, accountability, and decision-making efficiency requiring thoughtful design rather than naive pluralism (Freeman et al., 2020, pp. 112–145).

Workplace democracy and self-management: Organizations should maximize worker participation through democratic decision-making (voting on policies, electing leaders, and referendum processes), self-managing teams (delegating operational decisions to those performing work), participatory budgeting (involving workers in resource allocation), and policy co-creation (collaborative development of work rules rather than unilateral imposition).

Workplace democracy satisfies autonomy needs, develops civic capabilities, and generates social freedom – realizing one's purposes through mutual recognition in shared institutions. Cooperative enterprises demonstrate the feasibility of democratic governance at organizational scale. However, workplace democracy requires cultural transformation, conflict resolution capabilities, and patience with slower decision processes. Organizations should pursue democratic deepening appropriate to the context rather than assuming one model suits all circumstances (Rothschild, 2016).

Transparency and information access: Democratic participation requires information through open-book management (sharing financial and strategic information with employees), decision explanation (providing rationales for choices affecting workers), meeting transparency (opening governance deliberations to observation), and communication infrastructure (platforms enabling information flow and dialogue).

Information asymmetries enable manipulation and prevent informed participation. Democratic legitimacy requires transparency enabling stakeholders to assess organizational activities and hold decision-makers accountable. However, transparency has limits – privacy protection, competitive sensitivity, and negotiation confidentiality – requiring balance rather than absolutism (Fung et al., 2007).

Fair process and procedural justice: Governance procedures should exhibit fairness through consistency (applying standards uniformly rather than arbitrarily), bias suppression (preventing prejudice or favouritism), accuracy (basing decisions on reliable information), correctability (providing appeal mechanisms for unfair decisions), representativeness (including affected parties in decisions), and ethicality (upholding moral standards throughout processes).

Even when outcomes disappoint particular stakeholders, fair procedures enhance legitimacy by treating all parties respectfully and providing genuine participation. Procedural unfairness constitutes misrecognition – denying respect for persons' rational agency and moral status. From a recognition perspective, procedural justice represents the structural instantiation of mutual respect (Honneth, 2014, pp. 74–110).

8.6.5 Purpose and Meaning: Defensible Organizational Telos

Organizational purposes should be defensible, authentic, pluralistic, and generative of meaning rather than indefensible, hypocritical, or meaningless.

Purposive pluralism and stakeholder balance: Organizations should articulate and pursue multiple legitimate purposes rather than singular profit maximization: economic viability (generating sufficient returns for sustainability), employee development (enabling worker flourishing and capability growth), customer service (providing valuable products or services

enhancing welfare), community contribution (supporting local economies and social fabric), environmental stewardship (operating within ecological limits), and knowledge advancement (contributing to understanding and innovation).

These multiple purposes reflect organizations' embeddedness in broader social systems and ethical obligations to diverse stakeholders. Purposive pluralism requires navigating tensions and making trade-offs when purposes conflict but refuses hierarchical subordination, treating some purposes as mere constraints on profit maximization. From a *LebensFormen* perspective, organizations should be evaluated by whether they successfully serve multiple legitimate purposes rather than merely one (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Purpose authenticity and integrity: Stated purposes should align with actual practices rather than exhibiting purpose–performance contradictions. Organizations should walk the talk (implementing practices supporting professed values), acknowledge gaps (honestly addressing discrepancies between ideals and realities), continuously align (regularly assessing purpose–practice coherence), and have stakeholder accountability (enabling affected parties to assess whether organizations fulfil commitments).

Purpose hypocrisy – proclaiming values contradicted by practices – generates cynicism, erodes legitimacy, and constitutes recognition pathology by treating stakeholders as objects of manipulation rather than subjects deserving honesty. From Jaeggi's perspective, purpose–performance contradictions signal failed forms requiring transformation towards greater integrity. However, integrity doesn't demand perfection but requires honest acknowledgement of gaps and genuine efforts towards improvement rather than greenwashing or empty rhetoric (Brunsson, 1989).

Meaningful connection and visibility: Organizations should enable workers to comprehend purpose connections through line-of-sight clarity (showing how individual activities contribute to organizational purposes), outcome visibility (enabling workers to see results of their labour), beneficiary contact (connecting workers with those benefiting from their efforts), and impact communication (regularly sharing organizational accomplishments and contributions).

Meaning derives partly from understanding how one's work matters and affects others. When these connections remain obscure – invisible outcomes, opaque impacts, and distant beneficiaries – work feels arbitrary or pointless. From a resonance perspective, meaningful connection enables workers to experience efficacy and affection – seeing their efforts matter and touching others' lives (Grant, 2007).

Critical purpose reflection: Organizations should cultivate reflexive capacity for purpose questioning through ethics training (developing moral reasoning capabilities), critical discussion forums (spaces for questioning

organizational practices), stakeholder dialogue (engaging critics and alternative perspectives), and mission evolution (periodically revisiting purposes in light of changing circumstances and learning).

Purposes should not be frozen dogma but subject to ongoing reflection, examining whether they remain defensible and whether practices actually serve them. Organizations should enable rather than suppress critical questioning, treating dissent as valuable input rather than disloyalty. From an immanent critique perspective, identifying purpose–performance gaps or purpose inadequacies motivates transformation towards better arrangements. However, critical reflection requires psychological safety – spaces where workers can question without punishment – and genuine responsiveness rather than performative listening (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 294–360).

8.7 Implementation Challenges, Power Dynamics, and Transformation Pathways

8.7.1 Obstacles to Flourishing-Oriented Organizations

Implementing flourishing-oriented organizational designs faces substantial obstacles rooted in economic structures, power relations, institutional environments, and cultural assumptions.

Profit maximization imperatives: Shareholder capitalism's dominant logic treats profit maximization as a singular organizational purpose, subordinating all other considerations as constraints or instrumental means. This logic generates pressures towards cost minimization, labour intensification, and externality imposition rather than flourishing investment. Organizations attempting stakeholder-oriented arrangements face shareholder resistance, hostile takeovers, or capital flight threatening survival. Legal doctrines in many jurisdictions enforce fiduciary duties prioritizing shareholder interests and limiting managerial discretion to pursue stakeholder welfare (Stout, 2012).

From a critical perspective, profit maximization represents an ideological construction rather than economic necessity – corporations could operate differently under alternative legal and cultural frameworks. However, changing these frameworks requires collective action and political struggle against entrenched interests benefiting from current arrangements. Individual organizations attempting transformation within unchanged systems face competitive disadvantages, suggesting that systemic change requires co-ordinated efforts transcending organizational boundaries.

Competitive pressures and race-to-the-bottom dynamics: Market competition generates pressures towards cost minimization, potentially undermining flourishing investments. Organizations providing generous benefits, limiting work hours, or empowering workers incur higher costs than competitors minimizing such provisions. In competitive markets, high-road

organizations risk being undercut by low-road competitors, potentially generating race-to-the-bottom dynamics where competitive pressure drives towards minimal standards (Kalleberg, 2011, pp. 83–106).

However, high-road advocates argue that flourishing investments generate offsetting benefits – higher productivity, innovation, quality, and retention – enabling competitive success. Evidence from high-performing organizations practising stakeholder orientation, profit-sharing, or workplace democracy suggests that treating workers well can prove economically viable. The key involves escaping zero-sum thinking assuming worker welfare trades off against organizational performance towards recognizing synergies where humane treatment enables rather than undermines effectiveness. Nonetheless, realizing these synergies requires patience – benefits accrue over time, while costs arise immediately – and may depend on contextual factors limiting generalizability.

Managerial power and control prerogatives: Hierarchical organizations concentrate power in management whose interests may conflict with flourishing democratization. Managers benefit from authority, status, compensation, and discretion that workplace democracy or stakeholder governance could threaten. Resistance to power-sharing reflects not only ideological opposition but also material interests in maintaining privileged positions. Moreover, traditional management ideologies emphasize control, prediction, and efficiency, potentially conflicting with autonomy, experimentation, or democratic deliberation (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992).

From a critical perspective, transforming organizations requires confronting power relations rather than assuming convergent interests between workers and management. This suggests that change often requires pressure from below – worker organization, union advocacy, regulatory requirements, or social movements – rather than enlightened management voluntarily ceding control. However, progressive managers can play important roles as allies in transformation struggles even when broader structural change proves necessary.

Short-termism and financial market pressure: Contemporary financial markets reward quarterly performance, generate demands for immediate returns, and punish long-term investments lacking quick pay-offs. Organizations pursuing flourishing investment, training, development, community building, and sustainability that pay off over the years face market penalties compared to competitors maximizing short-term metrics. Private equity, activist shareholders, and financial analysts pressure organizations towards myopic optimization, undermining long-term sustainability (Laverty, 1996).

This short-termism reflects deeper problems in financial capitalism – treating corporations as bundles of tradable assets rather than ongoing communities with stakeholder relationships and long-term purposes. Addressing short-termism requires financial market reform – long-term ownership,

patient capital, and stakeholder representation – alongside organizational changes. Some organizations escape market pressures through alternative ownership structures (cooperatives, employee-owned firms, B corporations, and family ownership) enabling longer time horizons, though such structures remain minority forms.

Cultural assumptions and naturalization: Dominant cultural assumptions naturalize existing arrangements, making alternatives seem utopian, impractical, or impossible. Beliefs that hierarchy proves necessary for co-ordination, that democracy is inefficient, that profit maximization serves social welfare, or that humans are purely self-interested pervade management education and practice, limiting imagination of alternatives (Ghoshal, 2005). These assumptions exhibit ideological character – presenting historically contingent arrangements as natural necessities while obscuring power relations and foreclosing alternatives.

From a *LebensFormen* perspective, cultural assumptions constitute background taken-for-grantedness characteristic of forms of life, becoming visible only through disruption or encountering alternatives. Transformation requires denaturalization, revealing the contingency of present arrangements and exposing them as one possibility among others. This involves historical analysis showing that alternatives have existed, cross-cultural comparison revealing different arrangements elsewhere, and experimentation demonstrating alternative feasibility. However, denaturalization provokes resistance from those whose privileges depend on naturalized arrangements remaining unchallenged.

8.7.2 Transformation Pathways and Strategic Interventions

Despite obstacles, multiple pathways exist for moving towards flourishing-oriented organizational forms, operating at individual, organizational, sectoral, and societal levels.

Organizational experimentation and demonstration effects: Individual organizations can experiment with flourishing-oriented practices, demonstrating feasibility and generating learning. Successful experiments provide existence proofs challenging claims that alternatives prove impossible while offering models that others can adapt. Organizations like Patagonia (environmental commitment and employee development), Mondragon (worker cooperatives), Interface (sustainability leadership), and Buurtzorg (self-managing nursing teams) demonstrate alternative possibilities while acknowledging imperfections and ongoing challenges (Laloux, 2014).

Experimentation succeeds best when starting small (piloting practices before wholesale transformation), learning iteratively (adjusting based on experience rather than rigid blueprints), measuring broadly (tracking multiple outcomes beyond financial metrics), communicating openly (sharing

both successes and struggles honestly), and adapting contextually (recognizing that practices require adaptation to specific circumstances).

However, exemplary organizations face risks of co-optation – superficial adoption of practices without underlying philosophy – or dismissal – treating them as exceptional cases unsuited to "normal" organizations. Preventing these requirements is emphasizing transferable principles rather than specific practices while acknowledging structural constraints limiting what individual organizations can achieve absent broader change.

Collective action and labour organization: Worker collective action through unions, worker centres, or social movements can pressure organizations towards better practices while compensating for individual worker vulnerability. Collective bargaining enables negotiating wages, benefits, hours, and working conditions superior to what atomized workers achieve individually. Strong labour movements historically generated major improvements – weekends, eight-hour days, safety regulations, and pensions – demonstrating collective action's transformative potential (Freeman & Medoff, 1984).

Contemporary labour organizing faces challenges – declining unionization, hostile legal environments, employer opposition, and globalization enabling capital mobility. However, new organizing forms emerge – sectoral bargaining covering entire industries rather than single employers, worker centres organizing non-traditional workers, strikes and activism targeting corporate reputation, and transnational solidarity networks connecting workers globally. Revitalizing labour power remains crucial for balance-of-power shifts enabling flourishing-oriented transformation.

Regulatory intervention and mandatory standards: Government regulation can establish minimum standards protecting worker welfare regardless of individual employer decisions. Regulations mandating living wages, work-hour limits, safety requirements, anti-discrimination protections, or environmental standards prevent race-to-bottom dynamics by applying uniform requirements. Strong regulation levels playing fields, preventing competitors from undercutting through worker exploitation or environmental destruction (Osterman, 2018, pp. 157–182).

However, regulation effectiveness depends on enforcement capacity, political will, and avoiding capture by regulated industries. Moreover, minimum standards risk becoming ceilings – organizations doing merely what the law requires rather than exceeding it. Optimal approaches combine mandatory floors with incentives for voluntary exceeding and worker voice enabling enforcement. Regulation proves most effective when complementing rather than substituting for worker organization and organizational innovation.

Alternative ownership structures: Ownership forms profoundly affect organizational purposes and governance possibilities. Alternative structures include worker cooperatives (democratic worker ownership and

governance), employee stock ownership plans (worker co-ownership alongside democratic rights), B corporations (legal protection for pursuing stakeholder purposes beyond profit), public benefit corporations (explicit social/environmental mission alongside profit), social enterprises (organizations primarily pursuing social goals), and commons-based organizations (collective governance of shared resources).

These alternative forms escape certain pressures inherent in conventional capitalism – shareholder primacy, profit maximization, and short-term orientation – enabling purposes and governance arrangements better aligned with flourishing. Research demonstrates that democratic ownership correlates with higher worker well-being, more equitable compensation, greater stability, and comparable profitability to conventional firms (Blasi et al., 2013). However, alternative ownership remains a minority practice, suggesting that scaling requires both individual organization creation and systemic changes enabling alternative forms to compete effectively.

Consumer activism and market pressure: Consumers, investors, and customers can pressure organizations towards better practices through ethical consumption (purchasing from responsible organizations), boycotts (withdrawing patronage to protest practices), shareholder activism (using ownership stakes to demand change), divestment campaigns (withdrawing investment from harmful industries), and certification schemes (labels identifying responsible practices).

Market-based accountability has limits – consumer and investor power distribute unequally, information asymmetries prevent informed choices, and market mechanisms may prove too slow or weak for urgent problems. However, market pressure complements other strategies, particularly when organized campaigns create reputational risks or competitive disadvantages for laggard organizations. The key involves realistic expectations about market mechanisms' capacities alongside recognition of their limits requiring supplementation through regulation and collective action.

Cultural transformation and consciousness-raising: Underlying structural changes require cultural shifts in values, expectations, and consciousness. This involves critical education (developing the capacity to question naturalized assumptions), alternative narratives (telling stories of possibility beyond capitalist realism), value shifts (prioritizing well-being, sustainability, equality over consumption, status, and competition), and consciousness-raising (collective dialogue recognizing shared experiences and structural causes).

Cultural transformation occurs through multiple channels – education, media, arts, social movements, and everyday conversations. While cultural change alone proves insufficient absent structural transformation, it creates conditions enabling political mobilization and organizational innovation. The Frankfurt School emphasized ideology critique's emancipatory potential: Revealing hidden assumptions, exposing contradictions, and

denaturalizing present arrangements open space for imagining and pursuing alternatives (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, pp. 120–167).

8.7.3 The Role of Crisis and Contradiction

From Jaeggi's perspective, transformation often emerges from crises, when forms of life's contradictions become unmistakable, existing arrangements prove unable to resolve problems, and pressures for fundamental change intensify. Several contemporary crises potentially catalyse organizational transformation:

Climate crisis and ecological limits: Environmental breakdown's accelerating pace makes clear that current growth-oriented, extractive capitalism proves ecologically unsustainable. Organizations increasingly face material constraints – resource scarcity, climate disruption, regulatory tightening, and stakeholder pressure – demanding transformation. While incremental greening continues to dominate responses, crisis severity may eventually force more fundamental rethinking of growth orientation, consumption patterns, and production organization (Klein, 2014).

Meaning crisis and mental health epidemic: Rising burn-out, anxiety, depression, and meaning deficits – particularly among younger workers – signal that contemporary organizational forms systematically frustrate flourishing. Growing recognition of mental health crises, declining organizational loyalty, and increasing demands for meaningful work create pressure towards arrangements that better support well-being. Organizations face talent attraction and retention challenges when failing to provide meaning, development, and reasonable demands (Fisher, 2009).

Inequality crisis and legitimacy deficits: Extreme wealth concentration, stagnant wages despite productivity growth, and visible inequality generate legitimacy problems for contemporary capitalism. Organizations extracting value while workers struggle face criticism, organizing pressure, and political backlash. Legitimacy crises create openings for alternative arrangements providing more equitable value distribution and stakeholder inclusion (Piketty, 2014).

Pandemic disruption and remote work transformation: The COVID-19 pandemic forced massive remote work experimentation, disrupting taken-for-granted arrangements and revealing alternative possibilities. Many workers experienced benefits – eliminated commuting, family time, and autonomy – generating resistance to full office returns. This disruption opens space for rethinking work organization, questioning presenteeism norms, and exploring hybrid or remote arrangements. However, outcomes remain contested – some organizations embrace flexibility, while others reassert control (Putnam et al., 2014).

These crises don't automatically generate progressive transformation; they can also produce reactionary responses, authoritarian solutions, or system collapse. Jaeggi emphasizes that a crisis creates possibilities requiring political struggle, collective imagination, and experimental transformation rather than predetermined outcomes. Critical theory's role involves identifying contradictions generating crises, developing normative resources for distinguishing progressive from regressive responses, and supporting emancipatory movements pursuing transformation towards flourishing-enabling arrangements (Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 404–450).

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Index